**WAYS OF LOOKING AT A ROPE SWING**

By Joel Kaye

07754501519

joelkay0613@gmail.com

Characters

OLD MAN

OLD WOMAN

Props and furniture

two armchairs, with cushions

knitting needles and wool

watering can

newspaper

a letter

**Scene 1.**

*Two chairs.*

OLD MAN *sitting reading newspaper*. OLD WOMAN *sitting knitting.*

OLD WOMAN I don’t like the North.

OLD MAN Here we go!

OLD WOMAN I’m just making myself plain.

OLD MAN It’s not about the North

OLD WOMAN Of course it is.

OLD MAN Going up there is not about the North.

OLD WOMAN Well, what then?

OLD MAN It’s about seeing my brother.

OLD WOMAN Which is all to do with the North.

OLD MAN I want to go and see my brother. I’m not going to see the North. Stupid woman!

OLD WOMAN If you continue to talk to me like that I shall ignore you.

SILENCE

OLD MAN You don’t need to come.

OLD MAN *puts down newspaper and goes out.*

OLD WOMAN Maybe I won’t. (*pause* ) I shan’t let you go alone. Anything could happen in the North.

OLD WOMAN *puts down knitting and goes out.*

**Scene 2.**

*The garden*

*FX fade in birdsong as*

OLD MAN *enters with watering can.* OLD WOMAN *enters.*

OLD WOMAN They may not let you go.

OLD MAN Now, why do you have to say that?

OLD WOMAN Because I know how you get yourself all worked up.

OLD MAN I’m not worked up.

OLD WOMAN You get all dressed up days before.

OLD MAN Can’t a man wear a clean shirt when he wants?

OLD WOMAN You don’t eat properly. You can’t sleep.

OLD MAN Old people don’t need much sleep.

OLD WOMAN I do.

OLD MAN I’ve not noticed you lying awake.

OLD WOMAN You kept me awake – telling me at great length about how you and your brother, when you were children, made a garden swing with just rope.

OLD MAN Oh yes!

OLD WOMAN You told me last night, two o’clock in the morning, Friday night two o’clock in the morning, Thursday night two o’clock in the morning.

OLD MAN It meant a lot to us, that swing! Kids today wouldn’t know how – it’s all technology with them. What shall we talk about tonight?

OLD WOMAN At two o’clock in the morning? Nothing, if you please!

OLD MAN I was just reminiscing about happy occasions for me and my brother. There may only be memories left.

OLD WOMAN And then you get all maudlin.

OLD MAN Well, I may never get there.

OLD MAN *goes out*

OLD WOMAN That’s the problem. That ‘s just what I said.

OLD WOMAN *follows* OLD MAN *out.*

*FX birdsong fades to silence*

**Scene 3.**

*Two chairs.*

OLD WOMAN *is sitting, reading a newspaper.*  OLD MAN *enters, gestures at newspaper and sits.*

OLD MAN They’re both the same, you know. One lot’s as bad as the other.

OLD WOMAN No! How can you say that?

OLD MAN Because they are.

OLD WOMAN You’re not saying we’re as bad as the North?

OLD MAN Well, not you and me.

OLD WOMAN They’re ignorant. The food’s terrible. They’re like slaves. (*Pause* ) This anxiety – it plays havoc with your digestive system.

OLD MAN My digestive system is very sound.

OLD WOMAN It’s a good job we have sound plumbing. I bet they haven’t got that in the North.

OLD MAN I don’t know what they’ve got. I’ve never been. I’m not allowed!

OLD WOMAN Now you’re getting upset.

OLD MAN They won’t tell me anything here, either.

OLD WOMAN It’s not that simple.

OLD MAN They make out as if I’m making a nuisance of myself, just because I try to find out. I’m entitled!

OLD WOMAN But you’re round there every day, or on the phone.

OLD MAN Because they said there’s a chance! What if I’m out? When they call?

OLD WOMAN They’ll write to you.

OLD MAN They didn’t tell me that.

OLD WOMAN Did you ask?

OLD MAN They’re supposed to tell me.

OLD MAN *puts down newspaper and goes out.*

OLD WOMAN You’re as bad as they are.

OLD WOMAN *goes out.*

**Scene 4**

OLD MAN *is standing reading a newspaper.* OLD WOMAN *is sitting, knitting.*

OLD MAN The Americans are at it again.

OLD WOMAN I like the Americans.

OLD MAN Oh, I know that.

OLD WOMAN What’s that supposed to mean?

OLD MAN I remember - GIs.

OLD WOMAN I don’t like the direction of this conversation!

OLD MAN Well, they don’t do anything for me, the Americans.

OLD WOMAN It’s not for the Americans to get you back together with your brother.

OLD MAN Or stand in the way!

OLD WOMAN You know who you sound like now? You sound like them, with their accusations.

OLD MAN Call me what you like. (*pause* )All because you liked Americans!

OLD MAN *goes out.* OLD WOMAN *carries on knitting.*

OLD WOMAN *gets up and goes out.*

**Scene 5**

OLD WOMAN *is plumping cushions and arranging them on two chairs.* OLD MAN *enters, carrying a letter.*

OLD MAN Right then. That’s it!

*Pause*

Don’t try and tell me.

OLD WOMAN I won’t.

OLD MAN *gestures at the letter.*

OLD MAN Because it’s down here in black and white. You can’t say anything. I know it says ‘provisionally’ and there are ‘conditions’, but they always say that.

*Silence*

OLD MAN It’s been a bloody long time.

OLD WOMAN *goes to the exit.*

OLD MAN Where are you going?

OLD WOMAN I’m going to make some tea.

OLD MAN Well, aren’t you happy for me?

OLD WOMAN Yes.

OLD MAN You don’t believe me.

OLD WOMAN It’s not a question of that.

OLD MAN You never liked my brother.

OLD WOMAN We last met sixty years ago.

OLD MAN You didn’t like him then.

OLD WOMAN I’ll make tea.

OLD MAN No, just a minute.

OLD WOMAN What?

OLD MAN It’s a big thing for me, this.

OLD WOMAN Yes, I know it is.

OLD MAN Well, you might say ‘Congratulations’ or ‘Well done’ or something. (*Pause*) You don’t believe me!

OLD WOMAN It’s not that. It’s not that I don’t believe you.

OLD MAN It is.

OLD WOMAN Give me the letter.

OLD MAN No. It’s written to me.

OLD WOMAN The point is what’s in there.

OLD MAN I can read.

OLD WOMAN Just suppose you saw that rope swing today, what would you say?

OLD MAN The rope swing? It’d have rotted away by now. We were children. It must be seventy years ago.

OLD WOMAN But what would you say?

OLD MAN I don’t know. I wouldn’t say anything.

OLD WOMAN What would you feel?

OLD MAN Just a bit of rope.

OLD WOMAN After all that you said to me? You sat up half the night talking about that rope swing, how you made it, how you tested the branch.

OLD MAN Oh yes.

OLD WOMAN Jumping off it! The pleasure you had!

OLD MAN Couldn’t do that now!

OLD WOMAN Well, then!

*Pause*

OLD MAN It won’t be there now. They’ll have bulldozed all that.

OLD WOMAN To me, it would only ever be just some rope hanging off a branch. But to you it’s different. It would always mean something no-one else could see.

OLD MAN Well, girls never… (liked that kind of thing)

OLD WOMAN No, look. That letter means so much to you, so you don’t see it for what it is.

OLD MAN I do

OLD WOMAN To you it holds out the possibility of seeing the brother you’ve not seen in sixty years, since the war. It says, ‘Think of all the things you’d say to each other.’

OLD MAN He was cleverer than me, with knots.

OLD WOMAN But, in fact, it is just a letter which says maybe you’ll have a reunion, or maybe not. That’s all it’s saying. May be. May be not.

OLD MAN Don’t you think I know? Don’t you think I know? There was a war. We didn’t want it. But we got separated, like all those other families. And then they stopped the fighting. Sixty years ago, at the thirty-eighth parallel. And he was on one side, and I was on the other. And that’s how it’s been all these sixty-one years and I’ve had no contact. But I didn’t give up, did I? I persisted writing to this government and writing to the North. Well, now there’s a possibility. Now the North have said maybe they’ll arrange for some of us to have reunions over there. Maybe I’ll get to see my brother. Or maybe not. Do you think I don’t know? I’m an old man! I’m eighty years of age! Do you think I don’t know?

OLD MAN *sits down*

*Silence*

OLD WOMAN You’ll have to smarten up for it.

OLD MAN What?

OLD WOMAN You can’t go over there like that.

OLD MAN I’ve no intention.

OLD WOMAN We’ll need to buy you some new clothes.

OLD MAN I think there’s a new shirt still in a packet. In the wardrobe.

OLD MAN *stands up.*

OLD WOMAN I don’t think so.

OLD MAN Yes there is.

OLD WOMAN Show me.

OLD MAN You never believe a bloody thing I say.

*They go out.*

**ENDS**