

NICE AND KIND

By Stephen Taft

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CHARACTERS

JOY – Late 50's – early 60's, an amalgam of “The Golden Girls”

TREVOR – early 20s, handsome, educated

&

BOB – an imaginary Schnauzer

SETTING

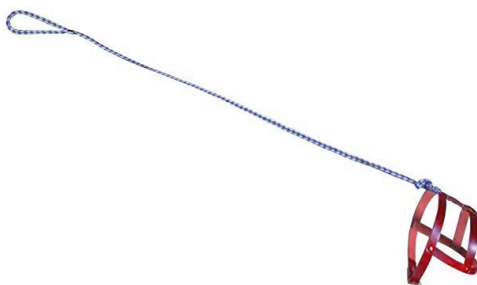
A park bench in a quaint small town.

TIME

Fall

SYNOPSIS

Once upon a time being “nice” or “kind” may have appeared to have similar meanings. In this 21st century, these two four-letter words appear to mean something quite different. With the aid of a sweet out-going woman (Joy), a young man (Trevor) and an imaginary dog (Bob), *Nice and Kind* explores the difference between being nice and kind in a humorous and heartfelt way.



Available on Amazon – \$11.09

AT RISE:

TREVOR sits on a park bench reading a book. JOY walks into the scene. SHE is carrying a bag of donuts and walking her imaginary Schnauzer (using an invisible dog leash).

JOY

Excuse me. May I sit down?

TREVOR

I suppose. Sure.

(TREVOR continues to read. Beat. A dog bark is heard nearby. JOY is suddenly pulled from her seat as her dog starts chasing after the other dog - off stage. TREVOR lowers his book to see what is happening. HE subtly reacts to what he sees. JOY has gained control of BOB and returns to the bench. A bit winded perhaps.)

JOY

I hate when that happens. He can be just a bit hyper sometimes. I hope he didn't disturb you.

TREVOR

No . . . no, it's . . . its fine.

(HE goes back to reading his book.)

JOY

Hi. I'm Joy.

TREVOR

Trevor. Nice to meet you.

JOY

It's feels so good to get out without a mask. I'm so thankful COVID is finally over.

TREVOR

Well, we still have to be careful. But yes, we are getting back to normal it seems.

JOY

God, I love fall! Sunshine, a cool breeze, the leaves are simply beautiful. After so many months cooped up its great to get outside and get some fresh air. *(Referring to BOB who she is now holding.)* He really likes it. *(Snuggling with BOB.)* Don't you little buddy? *(Beat. JOY offers TREVOR a donut.)* Donut?

TREVOR

(HE looks at her for a moment.)

No. I'm fine. Thank you.

JOY

Oh, go ahead. It's from the new donut shop in town. They're incredible.

TREVOR

I've heard. (*HE returns to his reading.*)

JOY

(*enticing him*)

You know you want one. There's a couple of Boston Crème, a crème-filled Long John, and because I like to get a little wild on occasion, a Cinnamon Twist.

TREVOR

I am a sucker for Boston Crème.

JOY

Help yourself.

(*HE takes a Boston Crème.*)

There you go! Now we're friends.

TREVOR

(*Polite but making a point.*)

Whoa! Wait a minute. You offered me a donut. I took one. That doesn't make us "friends". Here, you can have the donut back. (*HE offers it back to HER.*)

JOY

I don't want the donut. Sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. Please, eat it. Boston Crème. Pretty irresistible.

TREVOR

I'm not upset. It's just . . . you're a woman, a mature woman I just met in the park . . .

JOY

. . . on a beautiful fall day.

TREVOR

Yes, on a beautiful fall day. But, just because you offered me a donut . . .

JOY

. . . which you took . . .

TREVOR

. . . which I took, it doesn't make us friends. We just met. (*Beat.*) Thank you for the donut. It was nice of you to offer. (*HE bites into the donut.*)

JOY

You're welcome. I'll ignore the mature woman comment.

TREVOR

(HE loves the donut. Really loves it!)

This is amazing! I'm so sorry I was mean to you.

JOY

Oh, you weren't mean. You weren't nice, but who's keeping track.

TREVOR

I wasn't nice? *(HE eats the rest of the donut.)* What is *nice* anyway?

JOY

Apparently that donut. Have another one.

(SHE holds the bag out to him. HE takes another donut.)

TREVOR

These are great! *(beat)* So, back to nice. *(HE bites into the donut.)*

JOY

(Offering TREVOR, a napkin.)

Well, if someone eats with their mouth open, it would be *nice* if someone told them about it.

TREVOR

(suddenly self-conscious)

Am I eating with my mouth open?

JOY

No, it was just an example.

TREVOR

Oh, good. *(Beat.)* Now, if I told you, you were eating with your mouth open that would be a *kind* thing to do, not *nice*.

JOY

What?

TREVOR

It's true. If someone is chomping away and I can see the food, it's gross. So, if I say, "Would you please not chew with your mouth open?" That would be an act of *kindness*. The person may not have realized they were doing it.

JOY

I would say you were *nice*. "Would you please . . ." is a very nice way to approach the problem.

TREVOR

What if I were to say, "Hey, moron. Close your mouth when you eat. It's gross."

JOY

Not so *nice*.

TREVOR

Right. But letting a person know when they're doing something they shouldn't is a *kind* thing to do.

JOY

No matter how it's communicated?

TREVOR

Right.

JOY

(Loudly and looking just a couple of steps DS but still hanging on to the leash.)

WRONG!

TREVOR

What?

JOY

Bob. *(Referring to her DOG.)* That's the name of my dog. Bob. He just pooped.

TREVOR

He did?

JOY

He did. Thank god he's not a Great Dane.

(JOY rises to pick up the imaginary poop. SHE has doggy waste bags with her. TREVOR watches her closely.)

TREVOR

What kind of dog is he?

JOY

You can't tell?

TREVOR

No, I'm not very familiar with dogs. I'm a cat guy myself.

JOY

Ugg. I hate cats. All that cat hair around the house. On the floors, the stairs, the furniture. They climb all over the kitchen counter.

TREVOR

You've had a cat before.

JOY

Too many. My husband was a cat-guy. He loved cats. I needed a cat-free zone in the house. And if he didn't change out the kitty-litter, the smell could kill you.

TREVOR

Did you let him know?

JOY

Of course. "Honey, do you think the kitty-litter might get changed before I die? My life insurance is no reason to try and kill me."

TREVOR

That wasn't *nice*. It was sarcastic.

JOY

But to the point. By your definition I was being *kind*.

TREVOR

And what was his reaction?

JOY

Separate rooms. But, I got a pet-free zone to watch TV. And eventually I got the dog. (*JOY cuddles with BOB.*) How you doing pupperoni? You're being a good dog for this gorgeous man.

TREVOR

Please don't call me gorgeous. It's politically incorrect.

JOY

Politically incorrect?! I was being *nice*. (*beat*) I can't call you gorgeous? What? Too feminine? OK, how about handsome?

TREVOR

It's superficial . . . and demeaning. There's more to me or any person other than their looks.

JOY

Seriously?

TREVOR

Seriously. It's a new world. I know things were different back in your day . . .

JOY

Back in my day? How old do you think I am?

TREVOR

I wasn't implying that you're old . . . but, you're not . . . youthful.

JOY

Ouch. (*beat*) Look I may be climbing the hill, but I'm certainly not over it. And if that's an example of *kindness*, I don't need it.

TREVOR

Actually, I was being *nice*.

JOY

I'm confused. So, I can't tell a man that he's . . . attractive?

TREVOR

No!

JOY

Why not?

TREVOR

One, you're married and two, you're what? Twenty-five, thirty years older than I am.

JOY

Trying to guess my age is *not* nice. But, I'll take the twenty-five. And let me clarify that my husband and I aren't married anymore.

TREVOR

But, you're wearing a ring.

JOY

Some habits are hard to break. And it's my defense. I don't need any old guys making a move on me.

TREVOR

Good point.

JOY

Although young ones . . .

TREVOR

Inappropriate.

JOY

All right. All right. But, what's age got to do with anything? In some ways, I may just be in my prime. Do you think women lose their ability to recognize beautiful or handsome after a certain age? If I go to a concert, the music may be stunning. I find the paintings of Degas, exquisite. Today, is a beautiful day.

TREVOR

I get your point. (*Beat.*) So, you think I'm . . . handsome?

(*JOY licks the tip of her finger and slowly reaches out to touch HIS shoulder and providing her own personal sound effect.*)

JOY

Psst! Oooh. You've been upgraded to hottie. The finger never lies. Although if you really love donuts you may not always be a hottie. You could end up like my husband. Stealing donuts from the cupboard when you think no one is watching. And being a couch potato, having dinner in your "man chair" in front of the TV. Blowing up like a hot air balloon.

TREVOR

Not *nice*.

JOY

I was being *kind*.

TREVOR

I would have to eat a whole lot of donuts. Very tempting however.

JOY

Which means you'd keep coming back to the park bench to see a slightly older woman.

TREVOR

And her dog.

JOY

Want to say "Hi" to Bob?

TREVOR

Uh . . . no, that's OK.

JOY

Come on. He's gentle. Come here boy (*SHE picks up BOB. To BOB.*) No, now quit that. (*To TREVOR*). He loves to lick my face. Come on, pat his head.

TREVOR

(*Hesitant. Then, HE relents and pats BOB's head.*)

JOY

Oh, he likes that. (*to BOB*) You are one lucky pupperooni today.

TREVOR

You know this is silly. Right?

JOY

What is?

TREVOR

There's no "Bob" here.

JOY

What do you mean?

TREVOR

There's no dog. It's just you and me . . . and a leash.

JOY

Yes, there is. You were just petting him. *(to BOB)* Wasn't he Bob?

TREVOR

(very deliberate.)

It's just you, and me . . . in the park, on a bench, on a beautiful fall day.

JOY

With Bob.

TREVOR

THERE IS NO BOB!

(HE looks around to see if anyone heard him. Silence.)

Sorry. What happened to your husband?

(Pause. SHE doesn't say anything. Then . . .)

JOY

He died.

TREVOR

Oh, I'm sorry. COVID? *(SHE shakes her head no.)* How?

JOY

Those darn cats. He must've had 8, 10, 12. I don't know, I lost count. Anyway, we weren't sleeping in the same bedroom and one morning he wasn't in the kitchen reading the paper like he normally is. I called out and he didn't answer. So, I went upstairs to his room and there he was, with all of his cats around him. Stiff as a board. He apparently choked to death. Had a hairball in his throat.

TREVOR

(HE begins to laugh but stifles it.)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. That was inappropriate.

JOY

It certainly wasn't nice. But it is kind of funny if you think about it. (*Beat.*) He drove me nuts, but I loved him.

TREVOR

How long ago did it happen?

JOY

Last year.

TREVOR

Is that when . . . Bob, came into your life?

JOY

Yep. One morning I went out to get the paper . . . because people like me still get a newspaper.

TREVOR

And have a land line?

JOY

Oh, you know about those. You must be older than I thought.

TREVOR

Not *nice*. My grandmother had a land line and one of those old rotary phones.

JOY

Your grandmother? You're killing me. Killing me. But yes, I do have a land line. Cheaper than a cell phone. Anyway, one day I stepped out to get the paper and there he was. No tags. We just took a shining to each other. I called him "Dog" for the first few weeks I had him, but people just looked at me funny. So, I started calling him "Bob" and after a while most of the folks in the neighborhood seemed to accept him after that, which I thought was quite *nice*.

TREVOR

I think I'd define their actions as *kind*.

JOY

Why do you say that?

TREVOR

(*gently*)

Well . . . *they* know that there really isn't any Bob. There's not really a dog on the end of that leash. You know that too, don't you? They must know that you've been going through a difficult time, losing your husband and all and decided to just play along. And, well, their actions are a good example of being *kind*. Do you see the difference between being *nice* or *kind*?

JOY

I think we're splitting hairs. But, given that, I think I'm *too* nice. You know, there were times I so badly wanted to say, "What the heck is wrong with you people? There's no dog there!"

TREVOR

So, this has all been just an act?

JOY

Well, there's no Oscar on my mantel, but yeah, I guess so.

TREVOR

What is wrong with you? Are you just some kind of creepy woman trying to pick up younger, lonely guys like me?

JOY

Let's not forget handsome. *(beat)* Look, I've seen you here in the park this fall. Saw you last spring too – with your mask. Thank you by the way. Never saw anyone with you. Thought you might be up for a conversation or at least someone to share a donut with. And today you've taken the time to talk . . . to me. You didn't laugh at me, walk away, or call a cop. You didn't immediately accuse me of being creepy. I'm just . . . a mature lady with no kids or friends to speak of. Bob just gave me someone to talk to. We go on walks, go to a restaurant, even get a drink together at the local brewery downtown. Try doing that by yourself. People give you that pitiful look. We made people smile. It's a heck of a lot better than going out alone. The softball games are the best. The kids *see* Bob. Pet him. Talk to him. They're nice. We haven't seen a lot of that in this world recently. *(beat.)* I'm sorry to have bothered you. I really appreciate your time.

(JOY rises and begins to leave. HE calls after HER.)

TREVOR

Will I see you again?

JOY

(SHE stops, turns and smiles.)

I'll be at the donut shop tomorrow morning about 8:30. Just getting a Boston Crème and a latte.

TREVOR

OK. Maybe I'll see you there.

JOY

That would be nice . . . *and* kind. *(SHE turns to exit.)* Come on Bob. *(BOB leads her off.)*

Lights fade to black.

-THE END-