

Waiting for Marie

A Short Play (approximately 10 minutes)

By Gary Davis

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CHARACTERS

RUSS	Gentleman in his 60s
GENE	Gentleman also in his 60s
WAITER	Any sex or age

SYNOPSIS

A gentleman sits at a café waiting to meet someone he hasn't seen in over thirty years.

SETTING

Set in the present at an outdoor café. There are a few small round tables with chairs. It is between breakfast and lunch so the café is empty except for Russ who is sitting at a table reading a newspaper.

SCENE OPENS

(Russ is sitting at a table reading a newspaper. There is a brandy snifter on his table. For a while nothing happens. Then Gene enters. He stands out of the café area for a while staring at Russ. Finally he moves into the café area, looks around and selects the table which is closest to Russ and sits down. A waiter enters.)

WAITER

Good morning, sir. We're between meals at present, but we'll start serving lunch in half an hour. While you're waiting, can I get you something to drink?

GENE

Ummm ... how about a brandy?

WAITER

Uh ... we have a number of fine brandys. We have –

GENE

Honestly I don't really care. Whatever you recommend is fine.

WAITER

Thank you, sir.

(exits)

RUSS

(after a pause and not looking up from his newspaper)

A bit early in the morning for that, isn't it?

GENE

I don't see that that's –

(pauses a moment as he sees the brandy snifter at Russ's table and his irritation passes)

Oh ... ha. Do they serve a good brandy here?

RUSS

(lowers the newspaper to see Gene, looks at his brandy and takes a sip)

Not bad. To be honest, though, I think I ordered it more for its medicinal value.

GENE

Well, that's certainly fair ... pretty much the same for me.

RUSS

Case of the nerves?

GENE

You could say that. I have to meet someone that I'd rather not meet. You?

RUSS

Not quite the same. I am meeting someone. An old friend I haven't seen in a long time – over thirty years. So, a little nervous, yes, but I'm looking forward to it.

WAITER

(enters)

Your brandy, sir. Enjoy.

(exits)

GENE

(takes a sip)

Maybe I should have just ordered a whiskey.

RUSS

That bad? Not the brandy, the person you're expecting.

GENE

I used to think so.

(pause)

But enough about that. Do me a favor. Take my mind off of it. Tell me about this old friend that you're meeting. You seem to be looking forward to it.

RUSS

Well, as I said, I am a little nervous. But yes, I am looking forward to it. We met back in high school and were friends for several years. But when she got married, she moved away and I haven't seen her since.

GENE

Kept in touch?

RUSS

Yes, we wrote occasionally. And I'm talking letters here ... actual mail. Eventually that turned into email. So that was easier, more frequent. But less substance. You can send an email with just a single thought in it or reply with just an L-O-L. A letter takes some thought. You have to make it worth the effort. But being in touch was nice. Sadly we lost contact for a while.

(pause)

But then a few years ago I got an email from her out of the blue. And things just picked up again. I'm not sure I can explain it.

GENE

So what brings her back to the area?

RUSS

Well, during the last few years I've been developing my writing skills ... mostly theater scripts. At sixty four I'm an emerging playwright. Who'da thunk it? Anyway, I loved sharing my scripts with her ... well, with anyone, really. But she was among a handful of people who would reliably read them and give me

feedback. That means a lot to me. She once said that if any one of my plays ever made it to the stage, she would come see it.

GENE

So, you've hit the big time. Congratulations!

RUSS

(laughs)

I would hardly call it that. It's just a small local theater. I'm not really making anything on it. But, yes, it does feel like the big time. One of the perks at least is comp tickets. So tonight she's using one of my comps. She's heading back home tomorrow morning and since I have a lot to do at the theater today, this may be my only chance to chat with her in person ... maybe for another thirty years.

GENE

(long pause, then indicating the chair at Russ's table)

Do you mind if I sit here for a moment?

RUSS

Well, as I said, I am expecting my friend ... any minute now, actually.

GENE

(hesitates, finishes his brandy in one swig then moves to Russ' table and sits down, then with great difficulty)

Russ ...

(Russ reacts puzzled that Gene knows his name)

Russ ... Marie isn't coming.

RUSS

(immediately stunned, then suddenly stands up and steps back, breathing heavily)

You ... you're Gene, aren't you?

(Gene nods)

What did you do? What the fuck did you do?

GENE

Should I have done something? I mean, here you are having a meeting with my wife. What am I supposed to think?

RUSS

Oh for Christ's sake! There's nothing going on! We're just two old friends getting together for lunch to have a chat and catch up. That's it! That's all!

GENE

Really? Just two old friends? You were more than that I think.

RUSS

Yes, we were. There was a time that we were more than that. But that was long ago. Today we're just friends.

GENE

Really? Does your wife know you're here? Does she know you're meeting an old lover? Does she know you're meeting someone you once proposed to?

RUSS

And that still sticks in your craw doesn't it? To answer your question, yes, my wife knows I'm here to have lunch with an old girlfriend. But you haven't answered MY question. What the fuck did you do!? Why isn't she coming!?

GENE

(Gene's angry demeanor changes completely, almost like a deer in the headlights. He can hardly speak.)

She CAN'T come.

RUSS

Why not? What did you do?

GENE

I didn't do anything.

RUSS

You're obviously preventing her from being here.

GENE

No, no I'm not. She –

RUSS

SHE WHAT!?

GENE

(after a long painful pause and in tears)

She ... she died.

RUSS

(long stunned silence)

No, no, no! You – you're lying! YOU'RE LYING!

GENE

(still in tears)

Look at me Russ! Do I look like I'm lying? I wish to God I was lying!

RUSS

How is this possible? She said she would meet me here. Was there some accident?

GENE

No, she'd been sick for quite a while.

RUSS

She never told me.

GENE

There were a lot of people she didn't tell. Me and the kids, we knew ... not many others. She didn't want people to know. She didn't want them to see her differently. Apparently she didn't want you to see her differently.

RUSS

(long pause as he takes it all in, he's in shock, sits back down)

Why are you here? I don't understand why you're here, why you came all this way.

GENE

She made me promise ... that I would tell you. She didn't want you ... going through life not knowing.

RUSS

(long pause as he takes it all in, he's close to tears, takes a sip of his brandy)

I can see ... I can see that this wasn't easy for you. Thanks for letting me know. And you're right, you probably should have asked for a whiskey.

(long pause)

The last email I got from her was a couple weeks ago. When are the services? Or has that already happened?

(Gene is having difficulty responding)

Is there something else? What aren't you telling me?

GENE

(with great difficulty)

I'm sorry, Russ, I'm so sorry. I didn't keep my promise. I loved her, but I couldn't keep my promise.

RUSS

What are you talking about? What promise?

GENE

The promise to tell you ... to tell you that she died.

RUSS

I don't understand, Gene, you're telling me right now!

GENE

Oh, God! Why is this so hard?

(long pause)

Russ, Marie didn't **just** die. She died fifteen years ago!

RUSS

(stunned)

No, no, that's not possible!

GENE

You didn't lose contact. She didn't stop writing. She stopped ... being. She made me promise to tell you. But I was angry about that promise, angry at you, and I couldn't bring myself to keep it.

RUSS

But that's insane! She contacted me a few years ago. We've been writing since! That was her! I know it was! She sent me pictures! I'm not emailing some ghost!

GENE

No, no you're not.

(long pause)

You're emailing me.

(pause)

It had been more than ten years and I was feeling guilty that I still hadn't kept my promise to her. I would always tell myself that you wouldn't want to hear it from me anyway. Finally I was just going to email you myself ... just tell you ... and be done with it forever. That was the intention. I don't know why, but somehow I found myself writing to you ... as Marie. I never deactivated her account. I don't know why I did it and I was going to just delete it. But as I was writing, I know this sounds crazy, but it felt like she was there ... in the room with me ... telling

me what to write ... telling me ... to hit 'send.' Once I had done that, I didn't know how to undo it. I didn't know how to keep my promise. But at the same time, every time I wrote back it felt like she was there ... I missed her so much, I couldn't let go of that. I hope you can understand. I hope you can forgive me.

RUSS

(sincerely)

I do understand. And this may seem hard to process, but ... thank you. You may not have intended it, but you gave me a gift. So what made you decide to come clean on this?

GENE

Honestly ... I didn't want to. I didn't want to let go of her. But "she" told you that if you ever had one of your plays produced she would come to see it. I couldn't make a liar out of her. "She" forced my hand.

RUSS

Damn, she's tricky like that!

GENE

Isn't she?

(they share a laugh, Russ takes a ticket out of his pocket)

RUSS

I was going to give this to her. It's a ticket for tonight's show. You can have it if you like. I mean, you did drive all this way. And she'd probably want you to go.

GENE

Yeah, she probably would. You know, I really did like your plays.

RUSS

Really? Which one do you like best?

GENE

The musical I think. It really cracks me up. And "she" loves the songs.

(they stand to leave and shake hands)

RUSS

(starts to walk away, then hesitates and turns back)

Gene ... if I were ever to ... write Marie again ... would she write back?

GENE

(smiles hopefully)

She might ... she just might.

(fade to black)

The End