

VISITING HOURS

A monologue

By JANE CAFARELLA

Drama – 4 minutes

SANDRA, 40+, is visiting her father in a nursing home.

Softly, gently.

Hey, Dad. How are you?

I saw Mum yesterday. We went for a walk – with the wheel chair. Just around the corridors.

Of course, Norma came rushing up: (*imitating Norma – frantic and desperate*) “Nurse, nurse! I want to go home!”

“I’m a visitor, Norma, but I’ll get the nurse for you,” I said.

As usual.

Then Mum said, “I don’t want to be in here – with all the ga-ga people!”

As usual.

Sighs.

What could I say? I can’t look after her. I can’t lift her. Not since she’s had her leg off ...with all those ulcers that won’t heal.

“I know,” I said and I pushed her down that corridor with all the single rooms... hoping to find someone she could talk to.

There was a new name tag on one of the doors – “Richard” – with a photo of a middle-aged man standing in a river, wearing a hat and smile almost as big as the fish he’s holding.

The door was open. The other Richard, a smaller older version of the one in the photo, was sitting in an arm chair, his chin on his chest, staring at the TV - which was off.

“Hello!” I said, but he just kept staring.

Mum gave me that look!

I pushed on.

The next door was open, too. Another new resident. The name tag said “Jean” – with a picture of a kitten.

Jean was lying on a mattress on the floor. I don’t know why. Maybe she kept falling out of bed?

The sheet was pulled up to her chin, like a shroud. Pink scalp showing through thin white hair. Eyes closed. Mouth open like a fairground clown.

I wanted to close the door...so she didn’t suffer the further indignity of being observed by strangers like us.

But then I thought, maybe it was meant to be open– so that the life that went past could filter in, rather than hurry by?

She sighs again.

“I want to go home,” Mum said.

So we turned back ... to her room – with your black and white wedding photo on the door, the one with the satin horseshoe dangling from her bouquet – for luck.

“Here’s your clean laundry, Mum,” I said putting it in the drawer. And some of those shortbreads you like.”

“Thank you,” she said. ”Your blood’s worth bottling.”

And I knew it was coming...

She takes a deep breath.

“How’s your father?” she said.

“Fine,” I said.

And she looked at me with those milky blue eyes and said quietly, “I want to die.”

“I know you do, Mom,” I said.

“Will you help me?” she asked

I shook my head...

“I can’t...”

She nodded ... and looked away.

As usual.

Beat. She bites her lip.

“Got to go now, Mum,” I said. “Work. See you next week.”

“Yes,” she said.

Whispering, ashamed.

And I hoped, for all our sakes, that there wouldn’t be a ‘next week’.

She looks up suddenly towards the door, shocked out of her reverie by a nurse (unseen)

Oh, hello! I’ve brought his washing – and some more of that chocolate custard. He seems to enjoy that.

Brightly

Yes...he seems fine. Just the same...

She rises, addressing her father again.

Got to go now, Dad. See you next week.

... as usual.

490 spoken words

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