

The Waiting Room

One-act play

By Robin Landa

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

BETTY B. ERDER: A middle-aged working woman, age 55.

JACKIE KENNEDY ONASSIS: A poised, wealthy woman, 55, former first lady.

JOHN F. KENNEDY JR. (JOHN-JOHN): Jackie's son, struggling with passing the bar exam.

CAROLINE KENNEDY: Jackie's daughter, confident, chic and well-spoken.

Setting

A hospital waiting room at Lenox Hill Hospital in NYC. It's a sterile, quiet space with uncomfortable chairs. There's a TV playing the news in the corner. A vending machine hums in the background. A clock ticks slowly.

Time

Late October 1984

Scene 1: The Hospital Waiting Room

Setting: The hospital waiting room is quiet and sterile, with a few padded chairs and one sofa. A coffee machine hums in the corner. The sound of soft beeping machines can be heard in the background. Betty sits nervously, waiting for news about her husband Sidney. Jackie sits across from her, reading a magazine. There is a beat-up table with old magazines sitting on it.

BETTY

I'm waiting to see my husband, Sidney. We just got married, and he had a stroke. I had no idea he was so ill; he didn't tell me. Who are you waiting for?

JACKIE

(wearily)

My companion, Maurice. I wish they'd let us sit in their rooms with them.

BETTY

I like your sunglasses and scarf—a scarf is a good way to protect your hairdo from the wind. And I suppose it keeps people from recognizing you.

JACKIE

Oh my! I apologize for the sunglasses indoors. I hadn't realized I was still wearing them—I'm so used to having them on in Manhattan.

BETTY

Photographers and people can be very intrusive, I imagine. I wouldn't know but can imagine, you know.

JACKIE

I like your black outfit—very smart.

BETTY

Thank you! I must tell you that when you were in the White House I would always tell my daughter—"You see how smartly she dresses—understated and classic."

JACKIE

You're very kind. I do appreciate fashion. It's nice to hear something positive when the press and fashion critics are constantly scrutinizing my appearance. I do like Oleg's designs—don't you?

BETTY

Cassini? Who doesn't? But you can pull off any look.

JOHN-JOHN

(leans over to kiss his mother on her cheek.)

Mom, I got here as soon as I could.

JACKIE

Oh, darling. Thank you. Maurice gave me such a scare, but the doctors are taking good care of him. Darling, this is Betty; she's here for her husband.

(Jackie leans in toward Betty, speaking sotto voce.)

JACKIE

(mouthing)

Best not to call him John-John.

BETTY

(smiles.)

A pleasure to meet you, John.

(Betty leans in toward Jackie, speaking sotto voce.)

BETTY

(mouthing)

He's so handsome.

JOHN-JOHN

Nice to meet you, too. Well, Mom, I just want to make sure you're OK. I have to go back to the law library to study.

JACKIE

Yes, darling. Go do what you must. Let's pass that darn bar, my dearest boy!

(John-John kisses his mother on the cheek and leaves.)

The nurse comes in and tells both women visiting hours are starting.)

JACKIE

(smiles)

Lunch tomorrow, Betty?

Scene 2: The Hospital Cafeteria

Setting: The cafeteria is bustling with hospital staff and visitors. A large tray of sandwiches and coffee cups sits on a table between Jackie and Betty. The environment is busy and full of chatter, but they find a corner where they can talk privately.

JACKIE

Where do you live?

BETTY

We live in Jamaica Estates, next door to Fred Trump. Do you know Fred? Sidney likes him—they're always talking about real estate deals. But I find him crude, and his three sons are unbearable.

JACKIE

(Jackie chuckles.)

I've heard of Donald.

BETTY

This BLT isn't bad. When my mother was alive, I never had bacon at home—she kept kosher. She had no idea I ate it when I was out.

JACKIE

My companion, Maurice, is Jewish. His wife is so orthodox that she won't give him a divorce.

BETTY

That must be distressing for you. But you live together anyway? We are modern women, are we not?

JACKIE

Well, darling, once you've been married twice and had children, what's the difference, really? Maurice is devoted to me. It's a nice contrast to John and Ari. Maurice and I are very close. It's lovely.

BETTY

My first husband was a philanderer—cheated with so many women. He was a dancer, and they were all over him. At first, I couldn't understand why he needed two dress shirts a day. Then I realized—he was changing after work to go dancing. It took me a while to catch on, but once I knew, I couldn't even look at him.

JACKIE

I thought I'd figured it all out with the first one. Second marriages are often different. But it was more of the same. You must know what I mean.

BETTY

Sidney pursued me like crazy. At first, I didn't want to marry him because he had complicated relationships with his ex-wife and two grown children. I helped him reconcile with his police detective son, who was estranged. But his daughter didn't want him to marry for fear of Sidney not leaving all his money to her. She was upset with me that Sidney had reconciled with her brother. Can you imagine being that cold and greedy?

JACKIE

I am familiar with cold and greed. But not Maurice—he's generous and warm. He advises me on my investments. If you like, I can ask him to look at your investments.

BETTY

(chuckles to herself. makes a comical face.)

That's very generous of you. Thank you. I'd take you up on that offer if I had any money to speak of.

JACKIE

You mentioned a daughter. One child?

BETTY

Yes, one grown daughter. We're close, like you and your two. We'd better go back upstairs in case they want to see us.

CAROLINE

(enters the cafeteria carrying her coat across her arm.)

Mom, I was looking for you. Oh, hello.

(Caroline extends her hand to Betty.)

BETTY

You must be Caroline. It's a pleasure to meet you — just wish it was under different circumstances.

JACKIE

(to Caroline.)

Darling, hello. How are you? So good of you to come. Your brother was here yesterday, and I'm worried about him. He's so stressed.

CAROLINE

John will be fine, Mother. It's you I'm worried about. I hear you've been here at the hospital every day. That's not good for you, with all the paparazzi outside.

Scene 3: Looking Through a Fashion Magazine Together

Setting: Back in the hospital waiting room. Betty and Jackie sit side by side on the one sofa, flipping through a fashion magazine. The room is quieter now, just the two of them, with the occasional sound of a doctor passing by.

BETTY

(pointing to a page in a fashion magazine.)

Caroline is elegant—dresses like you. Oh! Look at this sheath. Would you wear this?

JACKIE

You can't have enough little black sheaths. Yes? You could pull it off with the right accessories—a string of pearls, perhaps? We're built similarly—so I know that would look good on you, darling.

BETTY

(chuckles)

I do love a black sheath. And I did have pearls but my daughter cut them up when she was making a dress for her Barbie doll; she wanted to make it a beaded dress.

JACKIE

(laughs quietly)

That's adorable. Is she a fashion designer now?

BETTY

No, but she is a graphic designer.

JACKIE

Lunch, Betty? BLT?

BETTY

(laughs)

Absolutely.

Scene 4: The Twist—Jackie Needs a Decoy

Setting: The hospital waiting room again. Jackie seems more tense now. Betty is just finishing a story about Sidney's last health scare. The door to the waiting room opens and closes, and a few nurses pass by.

JACKIE

(looks outside the window and sees the paparazzi gathering outside because they hear that John-John will be visiting. She becomes anxious, realizing she can't leave without drawing attention.)

Would you do something "crazy" for me? Would you wear my scarf, sunglasses, and coat to walk outside so that the paparazzi will follow you instead of John-John and me?

BETTY

(half-laughing, half-nervous. She takes the coat and accessories Jackie offers. Betty steps into Jackie's clothes.)

See you tomorrow?

Final Scene: Paparazzi Frenzy

Setting: Outside the hospital, Betty, now disguised as Jackie, is swarmed by the paparazzi. The paparazzi chaos is intense. Betty, overwhelmed by the flashes and questions, realizes the surreal situation she's in but is almost resigned. The flashes slowly fade as the lights go down, symbolizing Betty's brief but enlightening experience of being Jackie O.

BETTY

(emerging)

Hello, darlings.