

Early at the Restaurant

A short play by
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MR. BRIAN WALSH: lonely, rich, going through a divorce, has food allergies, 50s.

NINA: wannabe actress, waitress, originally from Eastern Europe or Russia, speaks with an accent, 30 years old.

JANKO: waiter from Eastern Europe or Russia. Speaks with a heavy accent, early 20s.

SETTING

A restaurant with a couple of tables and chairs.

TIME

The present.

SYNOPSIS

Lonely middle aged man MR. WALSH arrives early at his favorite restaurant to chat with his favorite waitress NINA. The news that she will be leaving the USA to start a new life back in her country makes him very uncomfortable.

EARLY AT THE RESTAURANT

There are two undressed tables with empty chairs. The waitress NINA, wearing an uniform and apron, enters to set the tables with cloths, napkins and silverware. MR. BRIAN WALSH, dressed in a fancy suit, enters.

NINA

Good morning Mr. Walsh. You're early today.

MR. WALSH

Good morning. I thought we were past formalities by now.

NINA

I'm sorry, Brian...

MR. WALSH

I'm joking. You're right, I'm being inconvenient.

NINA

Of course not. Not you. But I'm afraid the kitchen will take a while to prepare your food.

(Nina points at Mr. Walsh's usual table.)

MR. WALSH

No, no, don't worry. I just had a feeling that lovely Nina would be opening today.

(Mr. Walsh sits)

NINA

Those are some strong feelings right there since you already knew I was gonna be here.

MR. WALSH

I knew.

(He casually shows his watch.)

NINA

Is that a new watch? I love it.

MR. WALSH

This old thing? No, I was just bored.

(He brings the watch close to his tie.)

NINA

It matches your new tie.

MR. WALSH

Thank you, that's very kind of you to notice.

NINA

You got a hair cut... So things have been good? Better?

MR. WALSH

Divorce is still going on. Just life. But I don't want to bore you with these things this early.

NINA

It's no bother. How's accounting?

MR. WALSH

The reason for me being here today is to tell you to 'break a leg' in your audition, right?

NINA

Oh, yes, right.

MR. WALSH

It's tonight, right?

NINA

Yes, I had almost forgotten. I've been so busy lately I didn't even have time to perfect my new monologue.

MR. WALSH

Did something happen?

NINA

Just life. I'm actually going back to my country a couple of weeks from now.

MR. WALSH

Oh?

NINA

Yeah. It's my father. His condition is getting worse. So I think it's the right thing to do.

MR. WALSH

I'm so sorry to hear that. Are you ok?

NINA

Yeah, don't worry. I was never that close to my father. But I haven't been back in three years and is not like my life here is going anywhere anyway.

MR. WALSH

So you're planning on staying over there?

NINA

Pretty much.

MR. WALSH

Well, just give it some thought first, you know? It's a big decision.

NINA

I know. I have been thinking about it a lot

MR. WALSH

It's not easy doing what you're doing, coming here by yourself, being far from home, it's difficult.

NINA

Living the dream right.

(Nina spreads her arms indicating the restaurant.)

MR. WALSH

It takes time. Nina, you're so young-

NINA

Right. I'm thirty years old. For an actress that's like eighty in normal years.

MR. WALSH

-And funny- and strong. And you love acting.

NINA

I do...

MR. WALSH

And I love to see you acting.

NINA

It's just that I have practically convinced myself that I suck as an actor.

MR. WALSH

C'mon, you know that's not true. All I'm saying is that you should really think about it. And you have to prepare for your audition tonight.

NINA

I don't know. My mind is...

MR. WALSH

Anabella Bee?

NINA

Really?

MR. WALSH

It's my favorite.

NINA

I guess...

MR. WALSH

Do we have time now?

NINA

Now?

(Nina looks around, no workers in sight.)

NINA (CONT'D)

No...

MR. WALSH

C'mon, it only takes a minute.

NINA

Ok...

(Nina tries to get in character.)

NINA (CONT'D)

Hello...

(Nina starts over, clears her throat.)

NINA (CONT'D)

Hello! Anabella Bee! But you can call me 'Ana', or 'Bella', or 'Bee'! Resume? Yes of course. Smell it, it's jasmine. Isn't it good? Yes, five years as a publicist, three years as an agent, three years as a secretary. Me? I'm twenty two. Well, if it were all true I wouldn't be here in this interview, right? My qualities? I understand fashion! I live fashion, I dream fashion, I eat fashion, I wake up fashion, I AM fashion. Weaknesses? No! Hell no. Oh, because I got fired... My manager was a bitch. Five years from now? I want bigger boobs, and a lot of money so I can buy bigger boobs. That's why I want this job. That's it? Ok, thank you so much! Do I get the job? Oh right. Call me!

(Mr. Walsh claps. They both laugh.)

NINA (CONT'D)

It's so fake! It's nothing like me.

MR. WALSH

And you played it perfectly! I'm telling you, you can be anything you want.

NINA

Oh, well, thank you for that. I appreciate it. Anyway, I should probably get back to work, my manager should be here soon. Would you like the usual sir? Brian, I mean.

MR. WALSH

Maybe... Will you hand me that menu please?

(She hands him the menu. Mr. Walsh reaches for Nina's hand instead.)

MR. WALSH (CONT'D)

Open your hand.

(Mr. Walsh hands Nina a necklace.)

NINA

What's this?

MR. WALSH

It's a token of my appreciation.

NINA

Oh my god Mr. Walsh. I can't accept this.

MR. WALSH

No, please do. I can't return it anymore. And the person it was meant for doesn't want it for herself. So, it's yours.

NINA

Wow, it's beautiful.

MR. WALSH

Here, let me help you.

(Mr. Walsh stands and places the necklace around Nina's neck.)

MR. WALSH (CONT'D)

Looks great on you.

NINA

I don't know what to say.

MR. WALSH

No need to say anything. Like I said, I like you, and I appreciate your company and your service of course, which is awesome.

NINA

Did you buy this for Mrs. Walsh?

MR. WALSH

No. For little Kelly actually. But she doesn't want anything from her father.

NINA

No. I'm sure that's not true.

MR. WALSH

It's not untrue. But, yes... Mrs. Ex. Walsh finally managed to take my daughter away from me.

NINA

Unbelievable. That's so unfair to you Mr. Walsh. You know, I never really liked her. Every time you came here with her she was always in a bad mood and being mean for no reason. *'May I have the Bordeaux Merlot s'il vous plaît'*. Bleh, I didn't want to say this, but she was a bitch.

(Mr. Walsh chuckles.)

NINA (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry, I shouldn't have said that.

MR. WALSH

It's ok. That was pretty funny.

NINA

But no, she can't do this to you. She doesn't deserve you Mr. Walsh. I'm sorry, I keep calling you Mr. Walsh. Brian, I think you are a very decent man. And I am so sorry for you. I really wish I could help. But you know me, I can't help anybody. I'm a big mess myself.

(Mr. Walsh takes Nina's hands.)

MR. WALSH

No, no, you are helping me. You always do. You talk to me. I've been lonely, you know. I mean, that's pretty obvious.

NINA

You shouldn't be.

MR. WALSH

Listen Nina. I want you to think real hard before making any rushed decisions. Because I think you have a great future ahead of you right here. You're very talented, you're beautiful. You just need a little help. I can't bare the idea of seeing you go, so I want you to stay and together we'll figure it out. Your career, your visa, everything.

(Nina pulls her hand away.)

NINA

I don't know. I think I want to go back to helping people, you know? In my country, I think that if I study I can maybe get into medical school. I've been thinking about that a lot.

MR. WALSH

No, that's not what you really want.

NINA

And I do feel bad for my father, you know?

MR. WALSH

I understand, but Nina, what you've done, what you're doing, you did it on your own. Don't let other people drag you down. It's not the time for you to abandon your dream. I'm not gonna let that happen. So-

NINA

Ok. Mr. Walsh, Brian, sorry. I should go back to work. My manager will be here soon, I have to finish the silverware, I have to polish the glasses. I don't want to keep you here all day listening to my foolishness. So, the usual right?

MR. WALSH

Yes..?

NINA

Ok, great.

(Nina takes the menu from the table. Mr. Walsh snatches the menu from her.)

MR. WALSH

And no... This, hum, carrot soup. It's new, right?

NINA

Yes, but it has peanut butter, you can't have that.

MR. WALSH

Oh.

NINA

I'll give you a minute.

MR. WALSH

No, no. Can I please have the... Chicken?

NINA

Sauteed on water, I'll ask the chef.

MR. WALSH

Great...

(Nina writes on her note pad.)

NINA

No walnuts, obviously.

MR. WALSH

Obviously...

NINA

And no soy.

MR. WALSH

Replace soy with meat sauce on the side please. And the mushrooms you can sauté on the veggie broth. Again, be very careful, I'm allergic...

NINA

To everything, I know. I got you Brian, don't worry. Sauteed chicken on water, no walnuts, meat sauce on the side, mushrooms sauteed on veggie broth. Anything to drink?

(Mr. Walsh is getting sentimental.)

MR. WALSH

Yes... Maybe a glass of the Merlot from Bordeaux?

NINA

You got it.

(Nina tries to take the menu away.)

MR. WALSH

No. I want to change. Do you have the Chardonnay? From Bur... ger...

NINA

Burgundy.

MR. WALSH

Yes. And dessert I will order later...

(Mr. Walsh allows Nina to take the menu. She notices that Mr. Walsh is vulnerable but turns away anyway. He can't bare to see her go.)

MR. WALSH (CONT'D)

Sorry, is it too late to add an appetizer?

NINA

Sure.

MR. WALSH

The flan.

NINA

Do you want to start with the flan?

MR. WALSH

Or, which desserts can I do again?

NINA

The flan is gluten free... And the poached peaches.

MR. WALSH

Poached peaches to start and flan for dessert.

(Mr. Walsh starts to cry.)

NINA

That's a lot of food Brian.

MR. WALSH

I'm not even hungry.

NINA

I'm gonna fetch you some water.

MR. WALSH

Nina. I'm sorry, this is ridiculous... Please don't go.

NINA

I'll be right back and bring you some water.

MR. WALSH

No, no. Just stay. Don't go back to your country. If you do, you'll regret it forever.

NINA

Mr. Walsh, please stop.

MR. WALSH

Listen, just listen. I want you to marry me. Not as lovers, but for the visa. I'll help you. I'll provide for you, you can quit this job today.

NINA

Thank you, but no.

MR. WALSH

Please. Together we can be happy. I mean, we don't have to live together if you don't want to, only for the visa, I mean.

NINA

Let me go.

MR. WALSH

(aggressive)

Listen to me young lady. You are not going anywhere!

NINA

Let me go!

(Nina manages to pull away. Mr. Walsh bangs on the table.)

(Silence.)

NINA (CONT'D)

I'm gonna get the other waiter for you, ok?

MR. WALSH

Just a glass of Merlot will be fine.

(Nina removes the necklace Mr. Walsh gave her from around her neck and places it on the table. Nina leaves stage. Mr. Walsh is left alone.)

(The waiter named JANKO enters with a glass of wine. Janko places the glass on Mr. Walsh's table.)

JANKO
Anything else I can get for you sir?

MR. WALSH
No, thank you.

JANKO
Excuse me.

(Janko is about to leave.)

MR. WALSH
Wait, can I see that menu please?

JANKO
Of course sir.

(Janko hands him the menu.)

MR. WALSH
Thank you. I'm Brian by the way.

(Mr. Walsh offers his hand for a shake.)

JANKO
Nice to meet you sir. I'm Janko.

MR. WALSH
(scanning the menu)
How do you like it here, Janko?

JANKO
It's ok. I'm still learning. I'm guessing you're a regular here?

MR. WALSH
Indeed. I... Just want to order... The... Carrot soup. It's new, right?

JANKO
Yes sir. But I have tried it myself and it's delicious.

MR. WALSH

Good, good...

(Mr. Walsh is lost in thought.)

JANKO

Would you like any sides with it?

MR. WALSH

Make it a bowl. The big one, right? And, hum, shellfish! The clams, the big one too. Extra soy sauce, I love soy, just bring me the container. A basket of bread on the side, but not this gluten free bullshit, give me pumpernickel, I want flavour. A pint of the wheat beer, a cheesecake. Just bring everything at the same time. I'm starving... To death.

(Mr. Walsh raises his glass, does a halfway toast with himself and drinks.)

JANKO

(writing on his note pad)

Carrot soup, clams extra soy, pumpernickel bread, pint of beer and a cheesecake, all at the same time. Any allergies sir?

MR. WALSH

...Nope. Only to bullshit.

JANKO

You got it sir. I'll be back.

(Janko leaves. Mr. Walsh places a napkin on his lap and prepares himself for the meal.)

(End Play)