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Dramatic Publishing

BAGS

A one-act play

by

ANNE V. McGRAVIE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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ANNE V. MCGRAVIE

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NOTES TO DIRECTOR

The smoking in this play is used to indicate pressure the women are under—appropriate for that era. To accommodate actors and audience, smokeless or unlit cigarettes should be used. The play takes place during “The Troubles” in Ulster (Northern Ireland), commonly referred to as “the North.” It was an ongoing struggle, pitting Catholic against Protestant, the Irish Republican Army versus the Ulster Constabulary, who fought a civil war with bombs and guns, killing and maiming with impunity. A particular feature of the warfare was hiding bombs in shopping bags and leaving the bags in public places, such as stores and markets, where people gathered. Everywhere in the North signs were posted warning of unattended bags and asking that they be reported to the police, who would remove them and detonate them safely. Many bags were not detected, resulting in a heavy loss of life. As can be expected, life in the North was fraught with worries and fear. Jennifer is Catholic, Nettie is Protestant (Church of Ireland). The waitress represents the women’s irrational world.

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BAGS

CHARACTERS

NETTIE. 40-ish, Protestant

JENNIFER. 40-ish, Catholic

WAITRESS young, clueless

PLACE: The outdoor area of a large bakery shop, two tables for two, in a small city in Northern Ireland.

TIME: Early 1980s, early afternoon on a cool summer day.

BAGS

SCENE: *Small outside area behind a large bakery shop. Two entrances: one leading from bakery, the other to another section of outside area; bakery and other area not seen.*

AT RISE: *NETTIE sits at a table, drinking coffee, smoking, and doing a crossword puzzle in her newspaper. She is wearing heavy sweater and slacks. A large paper shopping bag inscribed "Maitland's Fine Fabrics" and containing fabric is at her feet.*

JENNIFER sits at another table, making a list on the back of an envelope. She is wearing white shirt and dark slacks, dark leather shoulder bag slung on shoulder. On the other chair is a large paper shopping bag inscribed "MacDonald and Sons, Purveyors of Meat and Produce." Her raincoat, draped over the chair, partially hides the bag. The women are unaware of each other.

WAITRESS enters from bakery carrying a large metal tray. She is wearing short black dress, small white apron with frilly pocket, and black cap with frilly edging. She crosses the stage.

JENNIFER (*as WAITRESS passes*). Excuse me? Could I—?

(*WAITRESS exits to other area [not seen]. JENNIFER returns to her list. NETTIE looks up, sees her, then returns to her crossword. JENNIFER takes pack of cigarettes from her bag, reconsiders, and returns pack to bag. WAITRESS returns with dirty dishes piled on tray.*)

JENNIFER (*as WAITRESS passes*). Excuse me? Could I have a—?

(*WAITRESS exits to bakery. JENNIFER returns to her list. A long moment, then WAITRESS re-enters with empty tray and crosses stage.*)

JENNIFER (*as WAITRESS exits [to other area]*). I don't suppose— (*Looks at NETTIE, who smiles sympathetically.*) There was a time when you could get a pot of tea without begging for it. Why don't they make it a cafeteria and be done with it. (*NETTIE smiles, then returns to crossword. JENNIFER continues, as WAITRESS reappears with a few dirty dishes on tray.*) Here goes. One more try. Excuse me? Do you think—

WAITRESS (*as she passes, speaking lightly*). Sorry.

JENNIFER (*more to herself*). Not half as sorry— (*Catching NETTIE's smile.*) She's becoming a challenge.

NETTIE. I'd like another cup of coffee myself, but I'm not sure I can face her down.

JENNIFER. It's the uniform. Bespeaks authority. (*NETTIE smiles again.*) And don't be fooled by the frilly cap and frilly little edging on the apron.

(*WAITRESS enters and approaches JENNIFER's table. NETTIE returns to puzzle.*)

JENNIFER. Now that's more like it. I'd like a pot of tea—

WAITRESS (*lightly*). You'll need to move.

JENNIFER. Move.

WAITRESS (*indicating NETTIE's table, lightly*). If you want to be served.

JENNIFER. Well I didn't come here looking to be ignored.

WAITRESS (*lightly*). Are you going to move, then?

JENNIFER. Am I allowed to ask why?

WAITRESS (*lightly*). What difference does it make?

JENNIFER. Given what we live with here, you have a point. (*Lifting raincoat, adjusting shoulder bag; approaching NETTIE's table.*) I'm sorry. I hope you don't mind. (*NETTIE smiles and folds up newspaper to make room on table. JENNIFER, throwing raincoat over chair, setting shoulder bag on floor by chair, to NETTIE.*) Are we in a safe zone, now, do you think?

WAITRESS (*seeing shopping bag on chair at now unoccupied table.*) That's your bag! Move it!

JENNIFER. Give me time and I will.

WAITRESS. Do it before I call security!

JENNIFER (*as NETTIE takes notice*). It's groceries, is all.

WAITRESS. It's an unattended bag! (*JENNIFER lifts bag and sets it next to her shoulder bag. She turns to NETTIE, who pretends not to have noticed proceedings. JENNIFER sits.*) Coffee or tea?

JENNIFER. A pot of tea and a scone, please.

WAITRESS. No pots, and we've only biscuits.

JENNIFER. You must have teapots surely.

WAITRESS. Cups is all.

JENNIFER (*resigned*). A cup of tea, then, and biscuits and cheese. A nice cheddar if you have it.

WAITRESS. Cream-filled. Chocolate.

JENNIFER. I was hoping for a nice fresh scone. Ah, well, cream-filled then.

NETTIE. I'll have another cup of coffee, if I may?

WAITRESS. I'm not supposed to be serving yous at all. The waitress for your table went home early.

JENNIFER. You're bringing me tea. Can you not—?

WAITRESS. That's just a good turn I'm doing Romona. See, she sometimes has to leave before her shift's over. Family problems. I don't ask, but it's obvious. Given the phone calls and all. So I try to help her out. D'you see?

JENNIFER (*including NETTIE in her question*). So...?

WAITRESS. See, there's the cashier to be taken into consideration. The tickets are the real problem. See?

JENNIFER. So...

WAITRESS. See, every time we give out a ticket we put our initials on them, and the cashier knows my tables are through there. (*Indicating other section.*) So if I went and gave yous a ticket, all hell would break loose, and we get enough of that. D'you see?

NETTIE. Mine's a refill. There's no charge for a refill. And the other waitress already gave me a ticket.

WAITRESS. Are you out to get Romona the sack?

NETTIE. I'm simply saying—

WAITRESS. See, I'll have to give you a ticket, and that means you'll have two tickets. For one coffee. And the cashier's the devil when it comes to handling anything out of the ordinary— See what I mean? (*Turning to JENNIFER.*) Right then. Tea and biscuits, cream-filled.

JENNIFER. If she already has a ticket—?

WAITRESS. Romona's ticket.

NETTIE. Really, it doesn't matter.

JENNIFER. It does to me. *(To WAITRESS.)* I need to get this straight. This lady was served her coffee by Romona, who gave her a ticket for it. One refill goes along with it. So she doesn't need another ticket—

WAITRESS. I'm taking a chance even serving the tea. You don't know the cashier. You don't know how she is to deal with.

NETTIE. Please, I'm fine, really.

JENNIFER. Why don't I do this? I'll go inside and get my own tea and this lady's refill of coffee and pay Genghis Khan the Cashier for both.

NETTIE. Oh, no. I can't let you do that.

WAITRESS. Suit yourself.

(She exits to bakery. JENNIFER slips on shoulder bag and reaches for NETTIE's cup and saucer. As JENNIFER leaves table, she knocks against her shopping bag and reacts with concern. NETTIE looks at bag.)

JENNIFER. Eggs. By the time I get them home they'll be scrambled eggs.

(NETTIE smiles and returns to puzzle. JENNIFER exits. WAITRESS enters with empty tray and exits to other area. She returns with trayload of dirty dishes. She is passing table, then stops, stares at JENNIFER's shopping bag.)

WAITRESS. Where is she?

NETTIE. She's in the shop.

WAITRESS (*still staring at bag; moving away*). I was just in the shop. She's not in the shop.

NETTIE (*concerned now*). She must be.

WAITRESS. That's her bag. That's her bloody bag!

(*JENNIFER enters carrying coffee and tea.*)

JENNIFER (*as she enters*). Saw one of my neighbors across the street. Remembered I had something to tell her. Crossed the street, trying to catch her, but lost her in the traffic.

WAITRESS. Next time you leave, take that bag with you. Unattended bags—

JENNIFER. I'm sorry, I didn't think. But I just ran across the street.

WAITRESS. Next time, take the bag with you! (*She exits.*)

JENNIFER (*placing tea and coffee on table; sitting. To NETTIE*). Goodness! You didn't think—?