

Do Not Despair, We Are Together

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Abstract

The given play talks about an old age home that is situated in a mofussil town at a little distance from the city. There are several characters and they share love, bonding and affection for the inmates of the old age home. Sometimes, there is dispersal of old and traditional values where the cultural and family bonding suffers from trauma and erosion of emotions. On the other hand, there are also levels of people who truly care for the inmates of the old age home not in terms of hypocrisy, but only to serve humanity better. Staying together does not terminate the connection between individuals, but it makes the human bonding stronger in critical times.

Keywords: Drama, Text, Stage, Performance, English Theatre

One Act Play

An old age home, tucked at the corner of a mofussil town, not quite far off Calcutta, untouched by pollution and smog. The old ladies and gentlemen, for sundry reasons, have come here to stay for the rest of their life. Nayantara is a widow of sixty-seven, who failed to adjust with the demands of her daughter-in-law and Soumya is a strong man of seventy-two, who never married and has a niece, who is a museology-student, to take care of and look after. She stays abroad and Soumya feels at home at SheshNeer, The Last Abode, for the wizened men and women. She seems to be interested in settling abroad. Hence, Soumya's decision to relocate to an Old Age habitat. The house at Jatin Das Road stands locked and secure. Nayantara's daughter stays in Paris, and she is happily married to a French Professor.

It is at 7 a.m. The dining hall of SheshNeer, where the inmates are being served with their frugal breakfast. An old lady, in her sixties, enters and looks for an empty seat to have her breakfast. The hall is chock-a-block with the hoary headed inmates. They are so silent that no noise, no stir is heard. They are having their breakfast in silence. As most of them are toothless, no munching noise can be heard too. The lady finds a seat at last...

Nayantara: May I sit here, Sir?

Soumya: Oh sure!

Nayantara: Is anyone sitting here? I mean, is this seat lying unoccupied?

Soumya[lifting his eyes to her face] : Yeah... I am here since the last half-an-hour and none came to take this seat. Please have your seat...Are you new here?

Nayantara[hesitates]: O...okay...yes, I came this morning with my son.

In fact, my son has arranged everything. [She lowers her face to hide pearly tears, which well up to cloud her vision]

[Silence prevails for sometime]

Soumya: It is my niece who has dropped me in here. She has gone abroad to complete her course in Museology. I am biding time here, that's all.

Your son will come again to take you back, I believe... [Throws a jittery glance at her face]

Nayantara: My son loves me very much. My little grandson, Bublu, cannot stay without me. But, they are moving bag and baggage to Mumbai. My husband passed away just a couple of years back [two cups of tea are kept on the table by the waiter, in the meantime]. My son does not like to leave me alone in a vacant house. Hence...[looks around, calls the waiter and asks for toasted bread and omelette]

Soumya: Yes, I would like to have the same breakfast, Dheeru...[looking at Nayantara] Yes, this boy is Dheeru. He takes care of us. Looks after us. But he becomes very lazy just after serving breakfast.[Nayantara smiles]

[Dheeru serves them breakfast too]

Nayantara: Dheeru, can you please put a big jug of drinking water in my room? Room No. 106, upstairs.

Dheeru: Oh sure! You came today, Granny? I will put a jug for the day. If you finish drinking the water before tomorrow morning, you have to come downstairs or you can press the bell, whichever is convenient for you, for a refill. Don't worry, however.

Nayantara: I shall ask you, Dheeru. My knees ache, I shall not be able to come downstairs for a refill.

[In the meantime, uproar is heard. Someone has fallen ill upstairs. A flurry of footsteps, the entry of a medical man, Dheeru's immediate rush upstairs. Soumya and Nayantara exchange nervous glances.]

Soumya: If you do not mind, Ma'am, let's go upstairs to find out who is ill on our own. I know a few people upstairs though I stay on the second floor. We can take the elevator if you want.

[Nayantara finishes her breakfast. And moves to the elevator]

Nayantara: It's a good arrangement. I had no idea that this Home has an elevator!

[As they reach upstairs, two waiters are seen to quarrel over something, they managed to get from somewhere. A nurse runs to the corner room with a tray, with injection syringe, water, and some cotton on it. Nayantara and Soumya run in that direction, close at the heels of the nurse.]

The waiters keep quarreling between themselves.

Waiter1: See, I stole this shirt from the bottom of his mattress. He did not get any time to put this shirt on. His son came and handed it to him, on his birthday, yeah birthday. I shall take it. You take the coat.

Waiter 2: No way! The coat is a tattered one. I told you first about this shirt, stashed away beneath the mattress, didn't I? You better take the coat...Okay, do not shout, Dheeru may come to stake his claim to it, you see.[They lower their voices, but, quarrelling goes on in a muffled, disgruntled tone.]

The Doctor comes up the staircase and with a thoughtful face, goes to the corner room.

The nurse rushes out to take something from the desk on this floor.

Doctor: Deriphyllin, sister, please push it immediately. Open the window near her head.



Nurse: Okay, Sir! But, I had administered this an hour ago, as you directed over the phone.

Doctor: No worries. Push another ampoule.

Nurse[a bit agitatedly]: But Sir, his pulse is feeble. And he may not take it in.

Immediately as he said so, the patient's head drooped to the left side and he breathed his last. The first floor looked desolate immediately after. None was there to weep for this man. The Proprietor, a hoary-headed man in his fifties, came and threw a look at the sad face of the dead man and ran downstairs to break the heartrending news to his son.

Proprietor[on phone]: Yeah, morning! Very sad news! Your dad has just passed away! Could you please come down for minding a few essential formalities? ... Okay, we can...but for how long? Okay, if you are late to reach, let us know. [The Proprietor hangs up]

A few people, including waiters, nurses file into the room of the deceased.

The Proprietor goes up to the dead man's room, which he occupied alone.

Proprietor: Please vacate the room; I want to put the corpse on ice-slabs till his son reaches from Mumbai.

Dheeru: But, Sir? How long will it be?

Proprietor:[throwing an annoyed glance]: All of you, go and mind your work. Dheeru, do not touch a single thing in the room. Just wipe the floor, that's all.

[Dheeru takes a cloth and starts mopping the floor.]

In the meantime, a large slab of ice is brought in by the supplier. The corpse, stiff because of rigor mortis, is managed with much effort to lie down on it.

Dheeru looks at the dead man and shudders within. How can a man lie on a chunk of ice? Perhaps, a dead man can.]

[The maid who used to wait upon the dead man came in, touched the feet of the dead man in reverence, looked at the lifeless face for sometime and took the woolens from the bed , with an apology to Dheeru, as she had been asked by 'dadu' to take his woolens for her husband. Dheeru looked on, without words.]

Maid: Dadu used to love me very much, you know Dheerudada! So, who will take all these warm clothes save me? Dadu used to tell me, 'I don't need much of these clothes, you take some'. I never took a single one, but now, I must. Dadu asked me to take them for my husband, after all.

Dheeru: But, the Proprietor asked us not to touch any of his belongings.

Maid[nervous] : But, I have to take. Dadu's gift, after all. He won't be happy even in the Heavens if I refuse to accept the present. Don't let anyone know that I did.

[The Maid goes out of the room, putting all the clothes in a bag she was carrying.]

Dheeru files out too.

Enter Nayantara and Soumya along with a few inmates of SheshNeer...

Nayantara[walks towards the dead man, as he is kept on an ice-block in the corner of the room]: Soumyababu, this is life[her eyes are full of tears]! Even last evening, my son was telling me, you will be happy to stay with the people of your age and times. But, death will keep haunting you almost everyday, and see, I am getting the feel of it from this morning itself. [keeps quiet and looks at the dead man's bloated face]

Soumya: I am accustomed to such experiences. This man had some heart condition , I suppose. [He, too, looks at the man]

Man1: Rightly said, I came up last evening to say Hello to him. He didn't say anything save, "My son will come tomorrow." I thought, he got some news from his son. I talked less and listened to his reminiscences, his days with his son, with his wife, so on, so forth. ...Really, this is the abruptness of death! None knows when it will keep knocking at his or her door!

Man2: Exactly dada. Yet, so long we live, we have to be happy.

Soumya: Let's not talk here much. Let's go to the drawing room.

[They file out]

In the meantime, the son of the deceased comes and while taking away the corpse of his father, the young man asks at the counter...

Son: Hello, I must thank you for keeping body of my father for such long till my arrival. But, may I know whether any money is saved due to his demise quite early, I think, in eight months of his coming here as an inmate? I would like to accept the money, unused.

Proprietor: Welcome! But which money are you talking about? He deposited only Rs. 20,000/- and his eight months' stay here along with all the amenities he enjoyed would require even more. He assured us to pay another Rs. 50,000/- by the end of this year. So, you understand.

Son: Oh, I didn't know it . Anyway, I shall take his body to our ancestral residence at Kyd Street and find out if I can have any share. Never mind my asking however.

[The successful, business-minded son leaves with the corpse in a hired hearse]

Drawing Room:

They all take seats on the chairs, very perturbed, because of the death of one of their inmates. They crowd at the entrance while the body of the dead man was being taken away by his son]

Soumya [in a dejected tone]: Death [turns her head left and right] is inevitable! I cannot put up with such loss if it happens here almost every alternate day. Since my arrival here, I have witnessed three deaths! I feel so unnerved. [He buries his head in his hands]

Nayantara[looking nonplussed]: Yeah...but it could have happened everywhere else as well. Suppose, if we had siblings back home, if we all stayed together, wouldn't we lose one or the other at different times, as we kept aging? Let us accept it. This is reality. This is the hard home-truth of life.

Soumya: I know, yet, I wanted a different ambiance.

Nayantara: I have an idea.

Soumya[looking up at her face]: Of what sort ?

Nayantara: From tomorrow, we will do whatever we know, together. [All eyes of the old people, who sat there, lit up] For example, if you used to sing, you will sing for us. If you were in the habit of reciting poems, writing lyrics, plays, short stories we are here to listen to you.

Soumya: Okay, but where? Here, in the drawing-room?



Man 1, Man2, ladies and other gentlemen: WE will do. WE will not despair, we will live together.

Day after day, they went on regaling themselves with songs, recitations, oral stories.....

Soumya: I am young now. Yesterday, my niece called me up to say, Uncle, I am back. Now, you have to come home. I said, No, I am very happy here. I sing again.

Nayantara: My son says, Stay there. As I find you are having a new lease of LIFE! Am I right?

Man 1: I am having very good sleep since last week.

Man2: I am having bowels regularly.

Ladies and gentlemen: We are happy.

They sing together:

Life has many joys to offer
You are not alone, why suffer?
May we dance, may we sing
We then forget sorrow's sting,
Come let us be happy together,
Come, there is nothing to despair!

We were happy, we are too,
We will love and we will coo,
Come, sing and dance,
Life is just a God-given chance!
Make the most of it,
Ward off sorrows as shit,
Come, come join us
Stay, be happy with us,
Say, we are together,
WE never despair!!
[They all make merry, they hold hands together, smiling!]
[Curtain]

Note: (This is a one-act play written by the author and there is no citation required)