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Dramatic Publishing

SOFTY

by

JOHN O'BRIEN



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(SOFTY)

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SOFTY

A Play in One Act
For 1 Man, 2 Women, 2 Either, Extras

CHARACTERS

ADELE a young woman
DAVID her husband
WAITER (or WAITRESS) in the café
SOFTY a young woman
MAN (or WOMAN) interrogator

Extras:

PATRONS (in the café)
GYPSY ORCHESTRA (optional)

TIME: The Present.

PLACE: A sidewalk café, somewhere in the world where ordinary people are trapped in a web of violence.

NOTE TO DIRECTOR: There are two ways to do this play. The first is neutral, using no identifiable costumes or accents. In this way, the play stands for all political conflicts. The second is topical. It could be anywhere in the world where one group considers itself oppressed by another group.

SOFTY

SCENE: *A sidewalk café. Some PATRONS are eating. OTHERS sip wine and admire the sunset. Either on-stage or offstage, a GYPSY ORCHESTRA plays softly. A WAITER (or WAITRESS) moves from table to table, serving the PATRONS. DC are DAVID and ADELE. DAVID holds their infant daughter, wrapped in a pink blanket. They are posing for a picture. SOFTY, to their left, holds a small camera. DL, under a table, there is a black bag large enough to hold a car battery. The bag is positioned so that it can be seen by the audience, but not by the people in the cafeteria. As DAVID and ADELE smile, the WAITER walks upstage of them.*

DAVID and ADELE. Cheese.

WAITER (*trying to be funny*). American or Swiss? (*DAVID gives the WAITER a “You’re not funny” look. The WAITER shrugs and moves away. DAVID and ADELE smile at the camera. SOFTY snaps their picture.*)

ADELE (*to SOFTY*). Thank you. (*SOFTY gives the camera to ADELE. SOFTY crosses to the table DL and sits next to the bag. DAVID carries the baby over to SOFTY.*)

DAVID. Do you approve?

ADELE. He’s fishing for compliments.

SOFTY. She's beautiful. (*DAVID dances his daughter around the tables, doing figure-eights.*)

DAVID (*to the baby*). Did you hear what the nice lady said? (*He notices SOFTY sitting morosely. To SOFTY.*)

Are you happy?

ADELE. David.

DAVID (*to ADELE*). She doesn't have to answer.

ADELE (*to SOFTY*). My husband is an extrovert.

SOFTY (*to ADELE*). I don't mind. (*To DAVID.*) Yes. I'm happy.

DAVID. My wife and I are happy because we accept our fate. (*To SOFTY.*) Why are you happy?

SOFTY. Because my life has a purpose.

DAVID. What is it?

ADELE (*to DAVID*). Don't be nosy.

DAVID (*to SOFTY*). Sorry.

SOFTY. It's all right.

ADELE (*to SOFTY*). Would you like to join us?

SOFTY. You're very kind, but I have to leave.

DAVID. You just came.

ADELE. She can go and come when she wants to.

SOFTY. I just remembered something I promised to do.

DAVID. A promise is a promise.

ADELE. It's been nice meeting you.

SOFTY. Thank you.

DAVID. I'm glad your life has a purpose.

SOFTY. Me too. (*DAVID and ADELE are now engrossed with their baby. SOFTY makes sure the black bag is still under her table. The WAITER approaches her. He does not see the bag.*)

WAITER. Can I get you anything?

SOFTY (*startled*). Red wine. No hurry.

WAITER. It's nice to meet somebody who's not in a hurry. We're all going to the same place anyway. *(He exits to the kitchen. SOFTY kneels on one knee. She reaches into the bag. From offstage, the sound of loud ticking. She withdraws her hand. She stands. She starts to leave. She stops to take one last look at the happy family. ADELE looks up and notices her.)*

ADELE. Good night.

SOFTY. Goodbye. *(She exits without the bag.)*

DAVID. She was a funny one.

ADELE. It takes all kinds.

DAVID. Another philosopher in the family.

ADELE. It's contagious.

(The WAITER returns with the red wine. He sees that SOFTY has gone.)

WAITER *(to ADELE and DAVID)*. Is she coming back?

ADELE. I don't think so.

WAITER. What do I do with this?

DAVID. *I'll drink it. (The WAITER gives DAVID the wine.)*

WAITER. You can't count on anybody anymore. *(He exits. DAVID and ADELE look at the sunset.)*

ADELE. Do you think time ever stops?

DAVID. Once, in everybody's life, if they're lucky.

ADELE. It just stopped for me.

DAVID. Me too. *(Blackout. Offstage ticking stops.)*

(In the darkness, we hear SOFTY humming Brahms' "Lullaby." Spot on SOFTY, DRC, in front of the curtain, if there is one. She holds her infant son, wrapped in a blue blanket. Near them is a cradle. When she fin-

ishes humming, she gently puts the baby in the cradle, kissing him good night, and tiptoes off. Blackout.)

(Sound of planes overhead. Sound of bomb exploding. Spot DLC, in front of curtain, if there is one, picks up SOFTY at the grave of her infant son. From offstage there is a low drumbeat. Blackout.)

(Spot DC, in front of the curtain, if there is one, picks up SOFTY, sitting in a chair. A MAN enters. He wears a black jacket and a ski mask.)

MAN. Freeze. (SOFTY does. He stays in the shadows.)

Who sent you here?

SOFTY. Nobody sent me. I came because I wanted to come.

MAN. There's still time to leave.

SOFTY. I don't want to leave. (He paces behind her.)

MAN. There's a job that needs to be done. We need a woman to do it. Does that surprise you?

SOFTY. No.

MAN. Why doesn't it?

SOFTY. Women are less suspect.

MAN. That's right. (SOFTY wrings her hands.) You're tense.

SOFTY. I'm sorry.

MAN. Don't be. (Long beat.) We don't want to do what we're doing. You know that, don't you?

SOFTY. Yes.

MAN. We're not murderers. Murderers kill for money or revenge. We'd do anything to avoid doing what we do, but if we don't do it, you know what will happen?

SOFTY. Yes.