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Just Passing

A play

Colin and Mary Crowther

Samuel French — London
www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk



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CHARACTERS

Man, aged 40-70: serene, refreshed

Woman, aged 40-70: volatile, exhausted

Nurse, aged 50-60: worn, caring - male or female,
Robin/Robyn

A park bench

Time: the present

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(See also page ii)

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*To all those receiving care and all those
caring – especially to Alan.*

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JUST PASSING

A park bench, old and weathered, clearly the favoured perch of an incontinent small bird, stands just to R of C, angled slightly to face out L

It is early one clear Spring morning, and the bench basks in dappled sunlight. It is surrounded by a little patch of low, straggling shrubbery, in which an empty sweet wrapper and a crisp packet have caught. An unloved, unvisited spot, planted, inevitably, with senecio and cotoneaster, and left to get on with it

None of this appears to bother the middle-aged Man who sits on the R end of the bench, still and comfortable, content to look out over the valley below. Only an old walking stick leaning by his side hints at an earlier illness, but it is so weathered it may well have been left out there for months: a stick which, like an old dog, is happier now waiting than walking

A Woman comes out to him from USL. About his age, she looks worn and pale, the effect emphasized by the clothes she wears: long, flowing lines in shades of grey

The contrast to him could not be greater. She looks carelessly elegant, he scruffily comfortable in an old cardigan, cords and, incongruously, leather indoor slippers. Whereas she looks angry, hurt and exhausted, he looks blissfully serene and reinvigorated

He seems to have been expecting her, for he smiles, but they do not feel the need to acknowledge each other, even when she sits on the stage left arm of the bench, with her back to him. Instead, she breathes very deeply. It is then, with her eyes closed, that she appears to realize he is there

Woman Thought I might find you out here.

Man Can't seem to ... drag myself away.

Woman Some of us don't have the choice. (*Rising abruptly*) I've no time for this. (*She takes her keys out from her pocket*)

Man For what?

Woman Games. (*Sitting heavily on the bench*) God, I never knew I could be so tired!

Man You're off, then.

Woman So much to do. After so much stillness, so long waiting, suddenly... How'd you know?

Man You've got your car keys out.

Woman House keys. Same ring. Came by taxi. Couldn't trust myself to... Oh God, is he waiting, too?

Man Did you pay him?

Woman No.

Man He'll wait.

Woman Poor man!

Man Rich man, soon.

Woman I seem to keep everyone waiting, these days.

Man I told you: pay the bills the day they come through.

Woman I did — I think. Except the phone bill. You wouldn't believe my phone bill!

Man I would.

Woman Oh, drat it! It can wait. He can wait. They can all dratted well wait!

Man That's the spirit!

The Woman jumps up and breaks slightly L

Woman And you can wait, too. This is my time! Mine! And I'll do what I damn well want with it!

Man Not so loud. (*Pointing, briefly, left and right*) You're enough to wake the dead

Woman Oh!

She looks up; her eyes search a building thirty feet away to her right; sees someone in a first floor window; calls out to them

Hallo...!

Man (*prompting*) John.

Woman John. How's the——?

Man Angina.

Woman —Heart? (*Pause*) Are you sure it's his heart?

Man Why?

Woman He can't hear me. His window is wide open, yet he can't hear me. (*Pause*) What am I doing here?

Man You can leave — any time you want.

Woman I can't.

Man Then stay.

The Woman seems persuaded. The Man sits back, contentedly soaking up the sunlight

There is a pause

The Woman breaks ULC and looks USL

Woman I can't! I should be down there. Helping. Or something.

Man You'd only be in the way.

Woman Typical!

Man Relax.

Woman How can I? It's only the tension holding me together. If I let go—for an instant—I'll go *skhwa*—like a jellyfish on a beach.

Man *Skhwa*?

Woman It's what they do. Jellyfish. On the beach.

Man *Skhwa*.

Woman Reminds me. I've forgotten something. What was it? My memory. Just doesn't seem to——

Man You should make a list. I keep telling you——

Woman Oh, you and your famous lists!

Man You and your infamous jumping in and doing things without thinking them through.

The Woman utters a low, growling scream as she comes to the back of the bench

Woman Damn! Damndamndamndamndamndamn, And drat!

Pause

Man I'm just saying.

Woman Will you look at this place! What a God-forsaken, scrubby, scruffy mess!

Man I like it.

Woman Oh yes! It's just the sort of mess you would like!

Man Other people like it.

Woman Who? People like you? Old men in macs?

Man People who like views. Down across the valley. Out over the town.

Woman And you all line up, do you? You and your little old men, on the crest of this hill, exposing yourselves to the view.

Man I do not have a mac.

Woman Pardon me.

Man And this is not a hill.

Woman You didn't have to climb it!

Man You came here.

Woman Looking for you.

Man Robin comes here.

Woman Looking for you.

Man I'm not sure. Sometimes I think he comes out here to get away.

Woman (*looking USL*) They're here.

Man I know.

Woman Thought I might—leave them to it.

Man Who did you use in the end?

Woman Sudbury's.

Man Good people.

Woman I hope so.

Man Trust me. I know.

Woman Yes. I suppose you would.

Man Anyway, Robin's with them.

Woman Robin?

The Man nods

Robin's wonderful.

Man Dirty sense of humour.

Woman Filthy.

Pause. They both chuckle

Stories he can tell. Things he knows. Places he must have been.

Man Makes you wonder where he spends his days off.

Woman Trust you to ruin it.

Man What have I said now?

Woman Mind like a sewer. The worst of it is you've even got me thinking like you now. You've got inside my head. *(She breaks R, clear of the bench)*

Man That's love for you.

Woman Marriage, anyway. Funny, we spend the first ten years trying to house train the savage beast. The next however many wondering if we wouldn't have been better off with Tarzan, after all.

Man I don't understand.

Woman You're not meant to.

The Man rises, walks forward to DSC, unaided

Man I do love being here.

Woman *(hopefully)* With me?

The Man is not listening, only looking

Man First time I came out here, it was dusk. Well, eventually it was dusk. Can't think how I got here. All at once, the lights came on—like the seaside—Blackpool! Strings of street lights, banks of shop lights, then house lights, one by one, as people—other people—went home and I, only I, was left behind, unlit—a child again, frightened, in the dark. Then I saw that stick—all pale and weathered—like it had been left outside—weeks—months ago—to guide another traveller through another night. When I go, I think—I think I'll leave it here, for the next little boy left alone in the dark.

The Woman shivers

Woman Wondered where it came from.

Man Then they found me—worked out how I'd got away—really tore me off a strip. They don't like one of their charges to make a run for it—not on their shift. I was confined to my room. To my chair. To my little cot. Like a naughty boy who once—almost once—escaped—what was coming to him——

He turns suddenly and faces out R

Woman Three years. Long time.

Man And now, all that has changed.

The Woman is completely abstracted, staring out over the view

Woman Nice for you.

Man Susie——

Woman Don't call me that! (*Turning towards him*) I never knew you were so fond of nature.

Man I'm not. I came here to feel connected—to feel I was still part—linked in some way—to all of that—to all of you.

The Woman crosses to RC

Woman You're not the only one, you know. I came here too.

Man I thought this was my secret place!

The Woman stops below the bench, staring at the stick

Woman Robin brought me—last week—he had—oh, something to tell me. Ever since, I've been coming every day. Whenever I wanted to really talk to you and needed you to really listen. Funny I should feel so much closer to you up here than ever I did down there.

Man I—don't remember.

Woman I'd rant and rave at you—And you'd say such—beautiful things—Always the right things.

Man Doesn't sound like me.

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