

THE BENCH PLAYS

by
Marj O'Neill-Butler

THE BENCH PLAYS

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THE BENCH PLAYS

*To Roger Martin, my first audience and forever encore.
These plays are the echo of every breath you cheered.
You believed in my whispers before they became dialogue,
in my midnight doubts before they shaped scenes.
Your laughter was the spotlight that found me
when I felt too small for any stage.
I keep writing because you taught me
that love can curtain-call beyond the final bow.
Though the seat beside me is empty,
I still hear you whisper, "Go for it, Babe,
make them feel what we felt.*

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CAST: 2M 3W or more

Eleven Short Plays and Comedies For and About Today's Seniors

All you need is a bench! Choose how many plays to use. You could add projections.
Or plants. Or anything else you can dream up. But keep it simple.
The plays can be produced in any order. Have fun!

Crisis On A Bench: You never know when another woman will see you, understand you and make you do what you're supposed to do whether you like it or not.

Two Old Men Sitting On A Bench: Grieving is always difficult. But if you have a friend with whom you can talk, it's a bit easier getting back into the swing of life.

One Old Lady Sitting On A Bench: A mother goes missing and her daughter finally finds her and we begin to understand the lives of both of them.

Two Men Share A Bench With A Nice Lady: One day it's a bit different when two brothers sit on a bench in the park and a nice lady comes along.

Don't Sit On A Bench, Get Up: You never know who or what will get you moving.

Conflict On A Bench: A schoolyard bully finally meets her nemesis years after the incident.

Two Ladies In Black Heading Toward a Bench: Looking for love in her later years, Susie gets her friend to go with her, looking to find a suitable man.

Secrets On A Bench: Peggy, Jeff's sister, gets her brother to contact an old flame. Peggy has a reason to want the connection to work.

Surprise On a Bench: A scruffy man chats up a woman sitting on a bench. There's a reason for speaking to her.

Two Schemers On A Bench: Old friends meet at the park and converse about being lonely and the lack of interest from their kids and grandkids.

Strays On A Bench: Lonely single seniors meet and arrange to create a social group.

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CRISIS ON A BENCH

a painful comedy

CAST: 2 WOMEN

CORA.....Older friend of Ella; logical; supportive; clear headed.

ELLA.....Unmarried single woman who finally found a mate; sentimental; unrealistic; disappointed in love

TIME: Morning.

PLACE: Somewhere in a city near a bench.

Ella comes screaming and crying into view, followed by Cora.

CORA. Wait! Stop. Come on...sit down.

ELLA. No, people I know'll see me.

CORA. You're yelling. For all the world to hear. And who cares?

ELLA. I waited so long to find someone. How could this happen to me?

CORA. Maybe it's just a glitch.

ELLA. It's not...he's asked me to move everything out.

CORA. Did you have any clue this was coming?

ELLA. No...we were planning...the wedding...the honeymoon...everything.

CORA. Come on...sit.

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ELLA. I can't.

CORA. Wait a day or so...he may change his mind.

ELLA. He won't. He started crying...said he's been thinking about it...that he couldn't get over his wife's death. Even after all this time. Would rather live alone than with me.

CORA. Harsh. Did you do something?

ELLA. No. We were eating supper...all of a sudden he blurted it out.

CORA. You're not a great cook.

ELLA. I never believed this could happen. I've been so supportive of him. And it's not that I chased after him. It was the reverse. He pursued me.

CORA. Sit down. Please.

Ella flops on the bench. Cora hands her a tissue.

ELLA. So, I guess for sure...I'll always be a spinster. As old-fashioned as it sounds. I wonder if I can return the dress? I've had it for four months.

CORA. When do you have to be out?

ELLA. I don't know. This was just last night. He slept in the den...was gone early.

CORA. Then take your time. And don't do anything for him. No cooking. No clothes washing. Let him remember his bachelor existence.

ELLA. I'm so...I feel as if my heart is....

Cora hands her another tissue.

CORA. Here. So he has a second bedroom.

ELLA. His den...but it's also his office.

CORA. Then he can sleep in there for now.

ELLA. The lease on my condo doesn't come up for two more months.

CORA. Good thing you kept the place.

ELLA. I'll have to buy all new furniture. I sold almost everything when I moved in with him.

CORA. So you'll start over fresh. That'll be good.

ELLA. What about the ring? Should I give it back?

CORA. Did he ask for it.

ELLA. Not yet.

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CORA. I say, keep it. Or hock it. It was a gift, right?

ELLA. I love it so. I've always wanted one like this. Been checking women's hands for years.

CORA. Then keep it. You deserve it.

ELLA. It was his wife's.

CORA. He gave you a second-hand ring?

ELLA. I admired it in a photo...then he gave it to me.

CORA. I've got a good jeweler you can go to...he'll give you a good price. Then you buy one for yourself. Not used.

ELLA. This was so...I haven't...ever thought about what I would do if...

Cora hands her another tissue.

CORA. Here, blow. Look, you have your job. You'll get your pension in a few years. You have your place.

ELLA. I was sure this was it. I've been dreaming about the future.

CORA. Keep dreaming. Change the dream.

ELLA. I don't want to.

CORA. Okay. Honestly. What don't you like about Bill?

ELLA. I...don't know.

CORA. Come on. Everyone comes with baggage.

ELLA. I don't want to badmouth him.

CORA. He broke up with you!

ELLA. I...he...isn't polite to waiters.

CORA. More.

ELLA. He's...lazy.

CORA. How?

ELLA. He says he'll do something, but never does. Never gets around to it.

CORA. And...

ELLA. He's started to repeat himself.

CORA. Tells the same stories?

ELLA. To whoever will listen. And he has a temper. Which I don't understand. He's had everything in life. Never worried for money. He's talented. Can do everything. Why can't some men be happy with all that?

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CORA. So...basically, he's not so great.

ELLA. I...

CORA. You wanted to marry that? It could only get worse. Especially with the repetition. He's probably told the same story over and over.

ELLA. He has. And I'll say "you already told me that"...but he'll go on anyway and repeat the exact same thing

CORA. So what's to lose here?

ELLA. He has many good traits.

CORA. Tell me.

ELLA. He's well off.

CORA. That's not a trait. Is he generous?

ELLA. ...No.

CORA. So, tell me more about Scrooge.

ELLA. He loves his family.

CORA. Including his dead wife!

ELLA. Oof, that's cruel.

CORA. Come on...you rattled off all his bad points. Give me some good ones.

ELLA. Um.

Silence.

CORA. Um is not an answer.

ELLA. ...I know.

CORA. So, what're you going to do?

ELLA. ...Regroup, I guess. I'll have to...

CORA. And...how will you do that?

ELLA. I'll...I'll...

CORA. Every day you'll get up. Shower. Fix a good breakfast and go to work.

ELLA. I'll have to tell the office.

CORA. Why?

ELLA. They're expecting a wedding.

CORA. Nothing needs to be said now. You'll get back to the gym. Get those endorphins moving.

ELLA. What are endorphins?

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CORA. Hormones. They relieve pain, reduce stress and improve your mood.

ELLA. That I could use.

CORA. Yes. So, you'll go to the movies with me. Plan a weekend away.

ELLA. That's expensive.

CORA. Stop paying Bill rent. He doesn't need your money. You'll sign on with Silver Singles again. This time I'm writing your profile. And no more crying widowers for you.

ELLA. It's tough out there.

CORA. Be tough. Take no guff. (Beat) Get up.

ELLA. You wanted me to sit.

CORA. Not now. It's time for action. What's your name?

ELLA. What? You know my-

CORA. Say it out loud.

ELLA. ...Ella.

CORA. Whole name. And out loud.

ELLA. Ella Bray.

CORA. And who is Ella Bray?

ELLA. I'm...uh.

CORA. Shout it out. You're a fabulous, talented woman who needs no one else to confirm it.

ELLA. This is silly.

CORA. Say it.

ELLA. I'm a fabulous...um...talented woman who needs no one else...

CORA. To confirm it. Shout it.

ELLA. There's people watching.

CORA. Don't care. Let's hear it.

Ella jumps up on the bench and shouts.

ELLA. I'M A FABULOUS, TALENTED WOMAN WHO DOESN'T NEED ANYONE ELSE TO CONFIRM IT!

The sound of a small group applauding is heard. Ella bows.

CORA. See. Everyone approves.

ELLA. I'm sweating.

CORA. Also good for your endorphins.

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Ella jumps down off the bench and exhales.

ELLA. You always make me feel better.

CORA. That's why we're friends. Let's go eat.

ELLA. Okay...I need to move it out...let's do our Laverne and Shirley walk to get there. Come on. You remember.

The two link arms and kick out their heels four times then walk eight steps...then they start again as they exit.

CORA. My knees are killing me.

ELLA. Good for your endorphins! Go!

They dance again and into the exit as lights fade.

END OF PLAY

THE BENCH PLAYS

TWO OLD MEN SITTING ON A BENCH

a gentle comedy

CAST: 2 MEN

STEVE.....older man; any body type.

MAC.....older man; any different body type.

TIME: Mid-afternoon

PLACE: A bench somewhere in a park.

Two old men are sitting side by side on a bench.

STEVE. Glad to sit with you again.

MAC. Been a while.

STEVE. Your son any help?

MAC. Not really. He has his own life.

STEVE. When will you make the decision?

MAC. Not sure. If I do, I'd be number forty-six on the waiting list.

STEVE. Holy cow.

MAC. These places take years to get in. Worse than the yacht club.

STEVE. I bet some people never make it...

MAC. Probably.

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STEVE. Huh. (Beat) If you sign up, forty-five people have to get sick or feeble before you can move in...

MAC. I suppose some of them might move on down the line...to assisted living or a nursing home. That's a possibility.

STEVE. Move down. That's depressing.

MAC. I try not to think about it.

STEVE. What?

MAC. Moving into dead people's homes.

STEVE. You always think of the worst. Maybe some move in with their kids.

MAC. Huh. (Beat). At least I'm still alive. And who knows...all those people on the waiting list...they might keel over all at once. Then I'd be able to move right in.

STEVE. Independent living places! If I'd known, I'd have invested in them.

MAC. Too late now...you're old.

STEVE. I thought it would take a little longer to grow old.

Silence.

STEVE. You still playing golf?

MAC. I'm back playing once a week.

STEVE. Who do you play with?

MAC. Andy, the minister of my church.

STEVE. You go to church?

MAC. Nah, but I figure I get "God credit" for playing with Andy.

(Beat) I think I depress him because he can't convert me.

STEVE. But you don't go to church?

MAC. Not anymore.

STEVE. What happened?

MAC. When my wife was sick at home, all the old single ladies were vying to sit in my pew. Like...like they were planning ahead. I couldn't even stay for the coffee hour...had to rush like hell to get to my car.

(Beat) I go on Wednesday nights, though.

STEVE. They have service then?

MAC. No, they serve hot meals for seniors.

STEVE. That's a deal.

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MAC. Costs me ten dollars! But, I flirt with the ladies, and they give me the leftovers. Then I run.

STEVE. You wily fox...

MAC. Gets me out of the house.

STEVE. I know what you mean.

Silence. Their eyes follow someone walking from right to left. They both let out their breath.

MAC. Wasn't she something!

STEVE. I could hardly breathe.

MAC. I didn't know they made skirts that short.

STEVE. You think you could handle her?

MAC. In a heartbeat.

STEVE. That's all it would take...a heartbeat...and you'd be the one off the list.

MAC. Young women like me.

STEVE. Yeah, for your money.

MAC. I never show off my money.

STEVE. Says the man with five cars. (Beat) And there's Google. No one can hide these days.

MAC. Not true. I looked up a friend of mine and nothing. Not a word. And he's loaded.

STEVE. Lucky guy. If he has it, I guess he can spend it...how he likes.

MAC. But he's a cheap son of a gun. He took his wife on a cruise last year...booked an inside cabin on the lowest deck.

STEVE. At least he took her on a cruise.

MAC. If you like dungeons...no windows...the cabins are pitch black. You wake up in the night, you think you've died.

STEVE. He *is* cheap.

MAC. I keep telling him, if he doesn't spend it, his kids will.

Silence.

MAC. Who's your doctor?

STEVE. Weinberg.

MAC. How old?

STEVE. I don't know. Sixty, maybe.

MAC. I've got a new one. Two of mine died.

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STEVE. You kill ‘em?

MAC. No, but I don’t want to keep changing doctors. I decided to get a younger one who’ll “take me on out”. I want to go before he does.

STEVE. Easier on the record keeping.

Silence. Their eyes follow someone moving from left to right. Beat. Mac whistles under his breath.

MAC. Well, skip to my Lou!

STEVE. Wonder where he got those purple shoes.

MAC. They don’t sell those at Macy’s.

STEVE. Are bell bottoms coming back?

MAC. If so, I have some in my closet. (BEAT) That was some “get-up”.

STEVE. I’ve never understood...you know.

MAC. My nephew is like that. He’s a really super kid.

STEVE. (Beat) I guess it’s one of the mysteries of the universe.

Silence.

MAC. Remember when we used to talk about girls all the time?

STEVE. Yeah. Now we just talk about our body parts.

MAC. (Beat) I went on a dating site.

STEVE. No kidding. The church ladies won’t do?

MAC. Not interested. I know them too well.

STEVE. Any luck online?

MAC. Not yet. You have to remember...at this age they’re all going to have defects. No one’s perfect.

STEVE. Meet anyone?

MAC. I’m hopeful. There’re a lot of women on those sites. You cast your line and see who bites. If you don’t like them, you throw ‘em back.

STEVE. How’d you figure out how to get on.

MAC. Elliot taught me.

STEVE. Your grandson?

MAC. He’s a whiz on computers.

STEVE. It’s a new world when your grandson pimps for you.

MAC. That’s a funny way to put it.

STEVE. ...Did Molly...you know... say you should go...“fishing”?

MAC. I never brought it up. It was the last thing on my mind then.

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STEVE. What do you think she'd say about it?

MAC. I don't know. When I was in college, she was jealous as heck.

STEVE. Did you cheat on her?

MAC. Not in so many words. I dated. A lot. Before she got to school.

STEVE. She must have been really committed to you...to go to the same college.

MAC. She told me she didn't want me to get away.

STEVE. Smart girl.

Silence.

MAC. Hard to believe she's been gone over a year.

STEVE. You spent a lifetime together.

MAC. I married her at twenty-one.

STEVE. ...You never talk much about her.

MAC. It's still...hard.

Silence.

STEVE. So, you going to do it?

MAC. What?

STEVE. Sign up? Sell your house...

MAC. I don't know. It seems like...I'd be erasing my life with Molly...

STEVE. No way. It's just a new part of your life. You'll always have your memories. You hardly start a sentence without saying "We".

MAC. I do?

STEVE. Always.

MAC. I guess I do...(Beat). Yeah, maybe it's time.

Silence.

STEVE. Nina told me to ask you to dinner tonight.

MAC. What's she serving?

STEVE. That's not polite.

MAC. I've decided in my old age, I'm not going to eat what I don't like. Not going to go where I don't want to go. Not going to put up with people I don't care for.

STEVE. You talking about me and Nina?

MAC. Of course not! Just telling you how it is.

STEVE. I think it's chicken piccata.

MAC. Over pasta?

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STEVE. Not sure.

MAC. What time?

STEVE. She said six.

MAC. Okay. I...thanks...for listening. (Beat) I miss my Molly's cooking.

Silence. Their eyes follow someone walking from right to left. Then they look straight ahead and take a deep breath.

END OF PLAY

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS--
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