

The Waiting Room

Characters

BET: A woman in her late 70s.

BONNIE: A woman in her early 30s.

Time: Present

Place: The waiting room of an oncology
cancer radiation.

ACT I

SCENE 1

A BONNIE and BET are sitting in a room bathed in harsh florescent light waiting to be called for their radiation treatments. There are magic-marker lines drawn across BET'S forehead, marking the areas where radiation will be administered. BONNIE is reading her Kindle while BET watches the afternoon soap opera playing on the TV hanging in the corner of the room. She begins talking to the television.

BET

Jen, honey, you are in some big trouble, messin' with him. He's gonna let you down and leave you flat, baby. Guarantee it.

(to BONNIE)

She just had an abortion, not even six months ago. Had one last year, too. You'd think she'd learn by now. These girls. Don't wanna wait for nothin'. They just wanna get on with it, you know. 'I got my own life. I don't want no kid holdin' me back.'

BET CONT.

Can't tell'em nothin'. They know it all. And they want it all. But ain't got one ounce'a sense in their head. Why, I remember when I ...

BONNIE

Excuse me, ma'am, but I'm trying to read.

BET

Oh, sorry, honey. I didn't realize. That thing in your hand don't look like a book to me. But you go right ahead; keep on reading. I'm just an old lady babblin' on. Don't mean to bother you.

BET sits quietly for a moment, looking at the TV, and then starts up again.

You know, I was never much for reading. I'd rather live things than read about 'em. And my life? Phew, now that would make some story. And let me tell you, you're damn glad you've done some serious livin' once you get the way I am now.

Points to her head.

I'm sure glad I took things on ... Won a few battles, too. So how 'bout you, honey?

BONNIE doesn't answer

Cat got your tongue? I said, how 'bout you?

BONNIE

How about me, what?

BET

You don't spend all your time with your nose buried in a book, do ya?

BONNIE

I enjoy reading.

BET

Oh, you're just like my son, Calvin. He loooved readin'. Just like you, 'cept he didn't have a light-up book like that. I'd call for him ... Calvin! Caaaalvin! When he had a book in his hand, the boy was deaf as dirt.

BONNIE

Well, you get involved in the story. It takes you to another world ... I can understand.

BET

Yeah, maybe that was it. Calvin liked bein' in another world. I'm sure it was better than the world he was in. I was always out workin' or lookin' for work. Who had time to sit on their ass and turn one page after another ... But Calvin, he read for both of us. I used to tell him, "Honey, it's good. You do all the readin'. You'll get yourself a good job one day. Not like your mamma. But, remember, you gotta go out and do some livin', too. Honey, you gotta live things, not just read 'em ... You do some livin', don't you?"

BONNIE

Of course I do. I live.

BET

That's good. You need to go out and step on those cracks in the sidewalk. You gotta cross against the red light sometimes and jump over fences. Make some noise in this crazy world. You need to let folks know you're still kickin'.

BONNIE

You are not going to let me read, are you?

BET

Sure I am, honey. I just want'a make sure you're circulatin' and pollinatin'. That's what I always told my Calvin. Son, you wait too long, it'll all pass you by ... Now, you look to me like a smart young thing. Pretty little girl, too. So you don't wanna be wastin' time - especially with what we got, you know.

BONNIE

Excuse me?

BET

You know, the Big C ... The stranger come callin'. Never know, honey. Never know.

BONNIE

I don't have the Big C.

BET

Oh, I'm sorry. So, you just watin' for somebody?

BONNIE

No.

BET

Then what are you doin' in this God-awful place?

BONNIE

Since you will not rest until I tell you ... I'm starting radiation therapy.

BET

If you don't have cancer, then why are they gonna charge up your batteries?

BONNIE

Oh dear ... Like I said, I don't have cancer ... Not anymore, that is ... It was just a Stage I. The radiation is a precaution. So it doesn't come back ... Added insurance.

BET

Uh, honey, I hate to tell you this, but since I been comin' here? I've seen a lot of people get their insurance canceled. Know what I mean?

BONNIE

Oh God, really ... I don't mean to be rude. But this conversation is upsetting me. Please, please, may I just read my book?

BET

Okay, okay ... don't get your underwear in a bunch. I'm sure it's just like you say. A little extra protection never hurt anyone.

BET turns back to the TV. After a few beats, she starts again.

You know Jen had breast cancer.

BONNIE is exasperated. She leans her chin on her hand and looks away.

BET cont.

She had a mastectomy. I think it was the left side. No, no, it was the right. That's it. I remember 'cause she couldn't sign the estate papers with her right hand ... Couldn't move that sucker for weeks ... So, they didn't have to whack off your breast?

BONNIE

Oh my God! No!

BET

That's good. 'Cause it'd be a real shame for a petty young girl like yourself ... Anyway, Jen's daddy left her a pile of money. Think she would'a gotten smart. But no, she started runnin' with

BET CONT.

that married man again, and then she had the abortion. She's fine now, though ... Now, I'm not hooked on these soaps, you know. Not like other people. I just watch'em when I come here. Yep, I'm a regular. This is my second big go'round. The first time was a doozy, why they ...

BONNIE

Ladies room?

BET

Oh, no thanks honey. I don't need to go.

BOONY

No, no ... Do you know where is the ladies room is?

BET

Oh, yeah, just around the corner over there.

as BONNIE is walking off stage

Whoa, whoa, wait a minute! Hold on. They got free coffee and tea out there. And those nice crunchy graham crackers. Would ya' mind bringin' me a cup'a coffee on your way back? And some'a them crackers?

BONNIE

Sure.

She turns to leave again.

BET

Whoa, whoa, You got ants in your pants? Let me tell you how I like my coffee. Ain't no good getting' a cup'a coffee with the wrong things in it. Now, you take one of them little creamers and just put a half'a one in there. Not the whole one - a half. I just like a smidge'a creamer. Then you plop in five'a them packets'a suger. Now, don't give me none'a that fake candy-maker stuff. Sweet and Low? The low means low-ded with POISON! That crap'll kill ya.

BONNIE

FIVE sugars?

BET

Yep. The hell with the diabetes. Don't matter no more. Can't taste shit anyway. Blew out my taste buds years ago with those cancer sticks. Smoked three packs a day, just like a regular truck driver. Had one in my mouth before I even opened my eyes

BET CONT.

in the morning. What'a ya think got me here? First the lung. Beat that one. Now it's in my noggin', what little brain I got left in there. So, yeah, five sugars. Make it real sweet, honey.

BONNIE

Okay, I got it. Five sugars. VERY sweet.

BET

Bingo!

She returns to watching the TV.

Mmm, mmm ... Honey, you can put your shoes under my bed anytime! Is he a sight to behold? Ain't nobody in my neighborhood looks like that. Oh, Jenny girl, you better be careful, 'cause from what I see here, you're cruisin' for abortion number three.

BET turns her head sideways as she follows the lovemaking.

Damn those commercials! Just when things are getting' good they cut to one'a those silly-assed dancin' soap pads. Just once I'd like to see 'em do the deed. All that kissin' and breathin' and then more kissin' and more breathin'. That sure ain't the way I remember it. Hell, one kiss, one breath and wham! It's over!

BONNIE

Here's your coffee, uh, gee, I don't know your name, though I feel as if I should.

BET

The name is Betty. Just call me Bet.

BONNIE

I'm Bonnie.

BET

Oh! (*singing*) My Bonnie lies over the ocean. My Bonnie lies over the sea. My Bonnie lies over the ocean, so bring back my Bonnie to me.

BONNIE

I've heard that a few times in my life.

BET

Probably just as many times as I've been called Betty Boop.

BET takes a sip of coffee.

BONNIE

Did I get it right?

BET

Ahh, who can tell? With all that stuff they shot into me, everything tastes like a car fender. I think this one's a '68 Impala. It's fine ... just fine.

BONNIE

She tries to start reading again, then puts down her Kindle.

So, how long do these treatments usually take? I've been waiting a while now. What do you think is holding things up?

BET

Oh, who the hell knows? Ain't a time you come here when one of their fancy-assed machines ain't down. Just like the ATM. Temporarily out of service. Story of my life ... You getting' chemo?

BONNIE

No! I told you I had a small tumor ... the size of a pinhead.

BET

Yeah, that's right. Sorry. A stage one - with insurance. Well, it's good you ain't havin' none of that chemo. It's nasty stuff, honey. Nasty. Makes you feel like shit and look like spit. But if you're just getting' fried like a chicken, it ain't so bad. It'll take 'em a couple'a days for 'em to line you up just right before they start zappin' ya..

BONNIE

I'm sure it's extremely technical, making sure to radiate the precise spot.

BET

Technical, hell. They just take a bunch'a big old magic markers and go to town. You get all graffitied-up, just like the side of a bridge.

BET points to her head. Then she lifts up the scarf she's wearing over her hair.

This one says Cool Earl. Can you see it?

BONNIE

How can you keep joking about this? I can't stand it! I can't stand thinking about it, talking about it, having to explain over and over to people what's going on with me. And the waiting! O my God, the waiting. It's all I've done for the past two months. Wait to get the mammogram. Wait to get the results. Wait to have the surgery. Wait to get the results. Wait to get the treatments. Wait to have this whole horrible thing behind me. I don't find any of it the least bit amusing.

BET

Why honey, don't you know it's the most amusin' damn thing you'll ever see? The more you come here, the more you wait, the funnier it gets ... So, now, don't you worry there, my Bonnie. Pretty soon they'll be linin' up your pretty little ass just right so when they zap you with that big zap gun they got, you won't light up like the Statue of Liberty when you go home.

BONNIE

Stop! Please! It's not funny.

BET

Oh honey, don't you now you gotta laugh. It's all we have to hang onto in this world of tears.