

Assisted Living

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RTF 333 - Screenwriting
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EXT. VALLEYVIEW PARK - DAY

The Valleyview Retirement Community park is small, but pleasant. There are a few tables and benches, a tree, and a pond. TWO ELDERLY MEN sit at one table playing Checkers.

GERALD GREENE, 79, unhappy but stuck there, walks outside with NURSE LIPSCHITZ, 41, kind and pale, and his daughter, LUCY, 51, overworked and under-caring.

NURSE LIPSCHITZ

This is where most of our residents
like to spend their time.

Lipschitz leads Gerald and Lucy toward the tables. The elderly men nod at them.

LUCY

Isn't this great, Dad?

GERALD

Spectacular.

Lucy rolls her eyes at him as they walk toward the pond.

NURSE LIPSCHITZ

Sometimes, I'll come out here with
a good book and just sit--

MILDRED (O.S.)

Run!

A voice calls out from up in the nearby tree, interrupting Lipschitz. MILDRED WEATHERALL, 76, sassy and full of life, shouts down.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

(to Gerald)

Get out of here while you can!

They all look to the tree. Mildred laughs, crouched on a few thick branches.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

I'm talking to you, you old fart!
Quick! Run!

Lipschitz tries to remain composed. She takes a few steps toward the tree.

NURSE LIPSCHITZ

Ms. Weatherall, I thought we
discussed this sort of behavior.

Mildred points at Lipschitz.

MILDRED
Hurry, while she's not looking!

Mildred continues laughing. Gerald wipes the sweat from his forehead. Lucy has a look of disgust on her face.

NURSE LIPSCHITZ
I'm sorry, I have to take care of this. It was a pleasure meeting both of you.

LUCY
Thank you, Nurse Lipschitz.

MILDRED
That's Shitlips to you, honey!

Mildred roars as Lipschitz hurries over to the tree.

NURSE LIPSCHITZ
Millie, come on now. Let's go eat.

Mildred laughs and throws acorns at Nurse Lipschitz.

LUCY
Dad, I've got to run.

Gerald stops laughing and looks at Lucy, who digs in her purse.

GERALD
Luce--

LUCY
Go eat some dinner. You'll feel better.

GERALD
But this isn't for me, Lucy.

Lucy starts walking back to the door, Gerald follows.

LUCY
You're going to be around people your own age. This is your home now, Dad.

GERALD
This is not my home.

LUCY

I can't take care of you anymore.
With Mom around, it was easier.

Lucy pulls out a cellphone and puts the purse strap back on her shoulder.

GERALD

And now you just don't have time.

LUCY

I can't be with you 24/7.

GERALD

I'm not asking you to.

LUCY

Well, what happens when you slip
and fall? What happens when you
catch the house on fire?

GERALD

I'm not a child, Luce.

Lucy stops and looks at her father in frustration and pity,
then turns and continues walking.

LUCY

I know that, Dad. But with your
leg, and your memory lapses--

GERALD

My memory is fine.

By this time, they have reached the door.

LUCY

Look, Dad, I'm sorry you hate me
right now, but we talked about all
this before.

GERALD

And I told you I didn't want to
leave the house.

Gerald again wipes his forehead.

LUCY

Just try and make the best of it,
okay?

Gerald shakes his head. Lucy places a hand on Gerald
shoulder. She exhales heavily.

LUCY (CONT'D)
 Goodbye, Dad.

Gerald stands watching her leave.

He looks back and sees Nurse Lipschitz attempt to climb the tree and slip. Gerald chuckles.

INT. VALLEYVIEW DINING HALL - DAY

Several RESIDENTS sit at tables eating, chatting. Gerald sits alone at the back of the dining hall, people-watching, barely eating.

ABIGAIL BURKS, 71, self-appointed welcome-wagon, joins him.

ABIGAIL
 Hello there. I'm Abigail Burks.
 What do they call you?

GERALD
 Gerald. Pleasure to--

ABIGAIL
 Look, I know this place can be
 pretty intimidating, first day and
 all. So I thought I'd slip on by
 and talk to you for a bit.

She pauses, smiling. Gerald takes a bite of mashed potatoes, looks up at her, and smiles back.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 Careful with that food there. It's
 Tuesday, and that means Joe Bates
 is back there cooking. Puts butter
 on everything. As if my
 cholesterol ain't high enough as it
 is.

She laughs. Gerald takes another bite.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 Well, I wanted to tell you, we have
 a Canasta game every night down
 here. And you're welcome to play
 with us. Margaret Little used to
 play, but now, bless her heart,
 she's gotta stay in bed all hours
 of the day. Denny Schwartz took
 her spot for a while, but that
 devil cheats more'n anything.
 (MORE)

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Anyway, we have a chair open for ya.

Gerald sips his water.

GERALD

Well, thank you for the invitation, but I think I'll make this one an early night.

ABIGAIL

Suit yourself. Though you won't get too far shutting yourself in your room like that.

GERALD

I think I'll be fine.

Gerald looks, distracted, as Nurse Lipschitz escorts Mildred in on the other side of the dining hall. She sits her down at the table closest to the dish window.

Abigail notices Gerald looking away and turns to see Mildred folding a napkin. Abigail shakes her head and clicks her tongue.

ABIGAIL

Mildred Weatherall. You don't want anywhere near that.

GERALD

How do you mean?

Abigail turns back to Gerald, lowering her voice.

ABIGAIL

Poor dear lost her mind years ago. These days, she spends all her time climbing trees, cackling like a loon, disturbing peace-loving folks like you and me.

Mildred finishes her napkin origami - a bird, places it in front of her, and smiles at it. Gerald smiles as well.

Nurse Lipschitz sets a plate of food, some silverware, and another few napkins in front of Mildred. Mildred pats her on the arm and starts to eat.

Gerald rises, carrying his plate.

GERALD

It was a pleasure, Ms. Burks.

ABIGAIL

Pleasure's all mine, dear.

Abigail waves him away and looks for somewhere else to migrate.

Gerald walks to the dish window. He tries not to make eye contact with Mildred, who stares at him as she eats.

He sets his plate in the dish window behind her.

MILDRED

You should have took my advice.

Gerald stops and looks at her. She stays on her food.

GERALD

Pardon?

MILDRED

Hard of hearing, handsome?

Mildred laughs with her mouth full. Gerald stays standing.

GERALD

I don't think I can stay here.

MILDRED

Ah, you'll get used to it. Took me a little while. But I must say, these days, it's home sweet home.

Gerald extends his hand.

GERALD

I'm Gerald.

Mildred looks at his hand then back to her food.

MILDRED

Sit down, Gerald. Friends call me Millie.

Gerald sits.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

Thing is, you have to get to know the place. It can be fun, if you let it.

GERALD

You mean like climbing trees?
Throwing acorns at nurses?

Mildred drops her fork.

MILDRED
Exactly! You'll learn to love
picking on Ole Shitlips.

Gerald turns like he's about to get up.

GERALD
I don't know.

MILDRED
You in a hurry, handsome? Got a
hot date tonight?

GERALD
I was just gonna head back to my
room.

Mildred goes back to her food.

MILDRED
Sounds like a hoot. But what say
you hang around with me tonight?

GERALD
I don't know.

Mildred takes a last bite and stands with her tray.

MILDRED
I do. You'll never get used to
being here cramped up in your room
all the time. You've got to find
some way to like it.

She walks to the dish window. Gerald stands.

GERALD
And you can help me do that?

Mildred throws in her tray. She sucks at a piece of food
stuck in her teeth.

MILDRED
I'll teach you.

INT. VALLEYVIEW HALLWAY - DAY

Gerald stands waiting as Mildred unlocks her door.

MILDRED

Just one second. I need to grab something.

Gerald nods as Mildred opens the door.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

Helps with the teaching process.

Mildred enters the room.

EXT. VALLEYVIEW PARK - DAY

Mildred leads Gerald by the hand closer to the pond. She sits and takes off her slippers, revealing her bare feet. Gerald remains standing.

MILDRED

Have a seat, handsome.

Gerald reluctantly and awkwardly crouches down beside her.

Mildred digs in her small handbag and pulls out what she had retrieved from her room: a flask. She unscrews the top and takes a jig.

Gerald looks in disbelief. Mildred smiles, shrugs, and offers the flask to Gerald. He smiles, takes it, and sips.

As he does so, she looks behind him at the tree. He follows her glance and then looks at her, questioning.

She looks away. Gerald takes another swig.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

I climb trees. I skin my knees.
That's the way I like it.

She looks back to Gerald. He hands her the flask.

GERALD

I draw landscapes.

Mildred nods. They look out as the sun sets over the pond.

MILDRED

You've got to find something that makes you smile. Something to distract your brain, keep it from going crazy.

Gerald smiles at the sunset. Mildred takes a drink, then screws the top back on and holds it up.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
'Course it helps if you've got a friend to get you through it.

Gerald laughs. Mildred puts the flask back in her purse and grabs her shoes. She nods towards the main building.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
It's getting dark.

INT. VALLEYVIEW RECREATION ROOM - EVENING

Several couches, card tables, a piano, and a TV adorn the room where Abigail and two other LADIES sit playing cards.

Mildred leads Gerald in and sits at the piano.

MILDRED
This is my second favorite thing in this place.

She starts to play an old love song. Gerald sits beside her.

She sings, smiling at Gerald. After a few lines, he joins in.

They smile at each other, singing, laughing, and then Mildred stops playing. She searches her mind for what comes next.

GERALD
You alright?

Mildred looks away.

MILDRED
I can't remember the rest.

ABIGAIL
Good. You sounded like a couple of dying cows anyway.

They don't acknowledge her. Gerald tries to play the next part of the song, missing keys here and there. He starts to SING, awkwardly, but Mildred does not join him.

Abigail continues with her cards..

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Thought it was going to be an early night.

Gerald stops playing and stares at his hands.

Mildred turns on the bench to face Abigail.

MILDRED

Goddamn it, Gail! Can't we just have a good time?

Abigail still does not look up from her card game.

ABIGAIL

Well, sure ya can, Mildred. Have all the fun you want. Go chase some squirrels, or whatever it is you do.

The other ladies laugh. Mildred stands, furious.

Gerald reaches to put a hand on her shoulder.

GERALD

It's okay, Millie. Don't do anything crazy.

ABIGAIL

I'm afraid she can't help that.

The ladies laugh again. Mildred looks to Gerald, hurt.

MILDRED

Crazy?

Gerald starts back-pedaling.

GERALD

I just meant that--

MILDRED

Don't do anything crazy?

Abigail finally looks over at them as Mildred sends the stack of sheet music scattering around the room.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

Like this?

Gerald stands. Mildred pounds on the piano, glaring at him.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
 Crazy, huh?

A tiny vase falls off the piano and shatters on the floor.

ABIGAIL
 Now, Mildred. Just--

Mildred turns away and flips Abigail the bird as she storms out.

MILDRED
 Suck it, Gail.

Everyone else in the room remains frozen.

INT. VALLEYVIEW HALLWAY - NIGHT

Gerald finds the door to Mildred's room and knocks.

GERALD
 Millie? Millie, you in there?

He pauses for a response.

GERALD (CONT'D)
 Look, I don't think you're crazy,
 Millie. I didn't mean what I said.
 It came out wrong.

He pauses again.

GERALD (CONT'D)
 Millie?

He puts his ear to the door.

GERALD (CONT'D)
 I just didn't want you to get all
 worked up. We were having a good
 time, and that miserable ...

He pulls away from the door and shakes his head.

GERALD (CONT'D)
 I want to be your friend, Millie.
 I want you to help me get used to
 this place. And I want to help you
 too.

He pauses, staring at the door.

GERALD (CONT'D)

Millie?

Gerald waits another moment and sighs. He gives up, and turns slowly to head back down the hall.

Nurse Lipschitz stands at the other end, holding pieces of a broken vase and a few small flowers.

NURSE LIPSCHITZ

She cares about you.

GERALD

I didn't mean to upset her.

NURSE LIPSCHITZ

It's not your fault. Millie just gets upset sometimes. But she lives better than any of us.

Gerald nods and looks to the floor. Lipschitz smiles. She turns, opening up the hallway for him, and nods towards the Exit door.

He looks to the door and smiles.

EXT. VALLEYVIEW PARK - NIGHT

Gerald walks to the tree and stops without looking up.

GERALD

I'm sorry, Millie.

He looks up to find Mildred, perched on the branches. She looks away and wipes her eye.

Gerald looks down, thinking.

He looks back up at her, takes a deep breath, marches up to the tree, and climbs it.

He positions himself next to her on a branch.

Without looking him, Mildred takes his hand, and smiles.

FADE OUT.