

The Waiting Room

by John Waterhouse

Excerpt

The Waiting Room.

Characters:–

Becky – An adventurous teenager

Angela – A friend of Becky.

Valerie – A friend of Becky.

Cornelius – A celestial being; articulate with a wry sense of humour.

Susi – A celestial officer.

Jackie – A young woman from a wealthy background.

Helen – A film actress and socialite.

Waiter

Park visitor (male)

Park visitor (female)

Brit Alehouse (female) a pop singer.

Debs – A girl living rough.

Camper 1 (male)

Camper 2 (male)

Canadian (male)

Jim – A boy whom Becky meets at Pinewood Studios; romantic interest.

Jane – A film actress.

Francesco – An excitable, film director

Tramp (male)

Synopsis –

Three teenage girls are on a camping holiday by the coast when Becky, the most adventurous of them, accidentally falls to her death, from a cliff top. Becky then arrives in a strange waiting room where she meets a young woman, who has recently been suffering from a long-standing illness. Cornelius, a friendly young man in a grey suit, arrives and explains that he is there to assist them whilst they try to sort everything out 'in the office'. Becky has to suddenly come to terms with her unexpected transition to the next world. Helen, a young socialite, then enters the waiting room, covered in blood from a stab wound. Distraught upon learning she has died, Helen runs back out of the room. Cornelius shakes his head; Helen has clearly not made the best decision.

In the waiting room, Cornelius explains to Becky that when someone dies unexpectedly, having had little experience of life, arrangements can be made to ease him or her into the processes of entering the next world. When thought to be ready, they can progress through the other door in the waiting room. Becky starts to think of all her unfulfilled hopes and desires. Cornelius offers Becky the choice between going immediately through the other door, from which there is no turning back, or going back to Earth to gain some 'life experiences' as an 'Observer'.

Becky learns that an Observer is given a new body with a new identity, and is put in situations where they can gain insights into certain aspects of life, with the option of going back to the waiting room at any time. However, there are conditions, one of which is that they cannot directly change the lives of people they come into contact with. Whenever an Observer wishes to return to the waiting room or try another experience, they can summon Cornelius at any time, by telepathy. Becky decides to take the option of becoming an Observer and finds herself in a variety of situations where she not only gains wider insights into human existence but also encounters other types of being from the supernatural world.

Act One Scene One. A cliff top.

(Becky, Angela and Valerie are on a cliff-top walk in Wales)

Valerie: This'll do. I want a rest.

Angela: Ha. We've only been going half an hour.

Valerie: So? I want a sit down. I can have a rest, can't I?

Becky: We've got all day. What's the hurry?

Angela: Oh, go on then. **(Angela, Becky and Valerie sit down)** Hey, I didn't realise we'd come this high.

Valerie: Well, there you go! If you keep on at a fast pace, you miss everything.

Angela: I can see the views. All I said was I didn't think we were quite so high up.

Becky: How far do you think we've come?

Valerie: I bet we've walked at least two miles.

Angela: Hardly a marathon then, is it?

Valerie: It's all right for you, on the netball team. I've never been good at sports; you know that.

Angela: No one's asking you to play anything, are they?

Valerie: But I'm not as fit as you.

Becky: Yeah, come on Angie. You could probably keep walking all day and not feel tired.

Angela: Well, ok but we've come away to get out and about, haven't we?

Valerie: I didn't think it would be this windy up here.

Becky: I love it. Breathe it in, all that fresh, sea air. **(Stands and turns around, arms outstretched)**

Valerie: How far are you thinking of going?

Angela: We need to go at least to that lighthouse.

Valerie: It's on the other side of the bay.

Becky: Come on Val; that's not asking too much.

Valerie: Oh all right, let's make a move then. **(Grudgingly stands up)**

Becky: We could climb down that cliff face to the beach.

Angela: You serious?

Becky: I’ve done climbing and abseiling in the Lake District.

Valerie: I bet that was with hard hats, ropes and everything.

Angela: Yeah, and I bet you weren’t as high as up here.

Becky: Well, maybe not. But I could still climb down there. I’m just going to have a look.
(Exit)

Valerie: Why don’t you go with her?

Angela: I’m not stupid. It’s Becks who’s crazy. She’ll probably get stuck and call for us to help her.

Valerie: Well, let her. I’m happy just sitting here.

Angela: What’s happening later?

Valerie: What do you mean?

Angela: What are we doing tonight?

Valerie: There’s the cinema, though I don’t know what’s on.

Angela: Do you fancy ‘Waterworld’?

Valerie: You mean that waterslide park? Yeah, could do.

Angela: We can get some of the boys to join us?

Valerie: You mean you want to try to get Pete to join us?

Angela: Well, yeah but he’s got his mates as well. What about Bri and James?

Valerie: Assuming that there’s nothing else organised.

Angela: This is our free day; we can do what we want.

(Enter Becky)

Becky: Hey, you two. You can get down from here.

Angela: Seriously.

Becky: Yeah. Come and see.

Valerie: Well, I don’t fancy any climbing. I’ll walk back along the top.

Angela: Hang on, Val. It might be worth checking out?

Valerie: You go and check it out. I’m ok here.

Angela: All right. Wait here. I’m just coming to have a look, OK?

Becky: Fine.

(Exit Angela and Becky. Valerie is alone and sits back closing her eyes. There is a scream)

Angela: (Off stage) Becky.....Becky.....Becky!

Valerie: What’s happened? Where are you? **(Runs off stage)**

Act One Scene Two. The Waiting room.

(Jackie sits alone by three empty chairs, in an ephemeral, plain room. There is relaxation music playing quietly. Becky enters, stage left)

Jackie: Oh hello.

Becky: Hi. Where am I? **(Looks around, bewildered)**

Jackie: Surprised? It isn't quite what I expected either but then, I don't suppose I really knew what to expect.

Becky: Excuse me? Do I know you?

Jackie: Me? No I don't so. I'm Jackie. Pleased to meet you.

Becky: Hello. I know this might sound weird but I'm not sure how I got here. I don't even know where I am.

Jackie: Oh, I see. Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know exactly where we are either but I guessed there was going to be something like this.

Becky: I don't get you; something like what? **(Starts pacing around the room)**

Jackie: It's no good pacing up and down. I did that for a while. I'm sure that someone will come for us soon. You may as well sit down.

Becky: Oh. Thank you. **(Sits down by Jackie)**

Jackie: You didn't tell me your name.

Becky: Oh, sorry. I'm Becky. Becky Riley.

Jackie: You'd think they'd put out magazines or something wouldn't you? You know, like at the Doctors.

Becky: I don't know. You were going to tell me what you meant by 'something like this'.

Jackie: Oh yes. Well, I don't really know, to be honest. I mean, what did you expect?

Becky: Me? I didn't expect anything. Where are we?

Jackie: Don't ask me. I only arrived a short time before you. I suppose this is where we start our journey. That is, I assume it will be a journey.

Becky: This gets weirder by the minute! I don't how I got here; I don't know where we're going! You can't answer any questions about this place and yet you seem completely relaxed about everything. Hang on; I get it.

Jackie: Ah. You've worked out where we are!

Becky: (Laughs) This is some TV programme, right? I've fallen asleep; maybe been drugged with something and you're here to freak me out, right? So that everyone can have a good laugh. Ha, ha ha. **(Gets up and tries right side door)**

Jackie: No, you're wrong. I really don't where we are. It's just that I've known for some time it was going to happen so I guess I've kind of prepared myself.

Becky: (Sits down). This is heavy.

Jackie: Where were you before you came in through that door?

Becky: Er. I just found myself in front of the door, opened it and here I am.

Jackie: Ok. Where were you before that?

Becky: I was with Angela and Valerie. They're two friends of mine. We were on a cliff top. **(Thinks for a moment)**

Jackie: A cliff top, eh?

Becky: I slipped and I seemed to be flying. Like it was a dream!

Jackie: I think I get the picture.

Becky: What did you mean about a journey?

Jackie: Did you assume it would be a land of castles and unicorns in the clouds?

Becky: You're freaky.

(The right side door opens and Cornelius, a smart young man in a grey suit, enters)

Jackie: Here's someone who might be able to help us.

Becky: Do you know this man?

Cornelius: Greetings, my dears. I'm so very sorry that you have both been kept waiting.

Jackie: No problem; we were just acclimatising.

Cornelius: Yes, I suppose it doesn't create a very good first impression. I suggested some nice decor or even a few plants but they wouldn't listen

Becky: Do you know where we are please?

Cornelius : Yes. I do but please, let me take my time in answering you. There is a lot to explain and I understand this must have come as a bit of a shock.

Becky: It's a perfectly simple question, isn't it?

Cornelius: The question is simple to ask. The answer depends in part in you.

Becky: You what?

Cornelius: (To Jackie) I think you have some kind of inkling; don't you?

Jackie: Yes. As soon as the pain left me and I found myself breathing normally, I realised that something had happened.

Cornelius: Let me first of all, I assure you that there is nothing to be alarmed about.

Becky: We've been kidnapped! What do you want? Money?

Jackie: I don't think you realise who this is Becky.

Cornelius: (Laughs) And who do you think I am, Jackie? The big man upstairs? **(Shakes his head)** I'm just an operative here. And by the way, we have here all the 'money' we could possibly need.

Becky: You're terrorists!

Cornelius: No! You certainly have not been kidnapped.

Becky: WHO ARE YOU AND WHERE AM I?

Cornelius: Where are you? Please don't concern yourself with such....preliminaries. There is nothing to be worried about but I must request your indulgence for the moment.

Becky: My what?

Cornelius: That is to say, I will answer all your questions very soon. Now, would you both like to join me?

Jackie: To go where?

Becky: Join you in what?

Cornelius: Why, join me in a cup of tea of course. **(Takes a tea towel off a small table to reveal a teapot and three cups and saucers).** If I'm not mistaken, you take one sugar and you take two.

Becky: How did you know that?

Cornelius: It's in your files.

Jackie: Ah, well that's wrong. I don't take sugar.

Cornelius: Since you developed the illness?

Jackie: Yeah, that’s right. I’m not allowed it.

Cornelius: And do you still feel ill?

Jackie: Well no, but....I feel liked I’m cured....so I suppose....yeah, I would like sugar....er...please.

Cornelius: (Puts some sugar in Jackie’s tea. All three all take a sip from their cups) I always find that a nice cup of teas helps establish an atmosphere conducive to discourse, don’t you think?

Becky: So how did I come to get here?

Cornelius: Well, I suppose it could be said that you flew.

Becky: I’ve not been in an aircraft for two years.

Cornelius: There are other ways of travelling. What is the last thing you can remember?

Becky: I was with my friends on the cliff tops.

Cornelius: What happened?

Becky: I was walking near the edge looking down. Then I slipped. I remember falling through the air very quickly. Oh, so that’s it! I was knocked out and a helicopter brought me here. So this must be part of a hospital, right?

Cornelius: (Looks around) I suppose it has certain similarities. **(To Jackie)** You know, don’t you? **(Jackie nods)** I understand that this has all come as a bit of a shock. I find it often helps to meet people in pairs. There is so much that you have to come to terms with. The purpose of this initial chat is just to put you at ease before you move on to the first stage. **(To Jackie)** You seem particularly well prepared. It’s obvious that you had a very loving family. Do you feel ready to move onto the first stage?

Jackie: Yes, I think that I do.

Cornelius: There’s no going back once you start. You’ll be ready sooner or later, but if you think you’re ready now, I’ll be very pleased.

Jackie: Is there an alternative?