The Prize

Arthur Keyser
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THE PRIZE

by

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CAST

ROGER BRANTLEY: A man in his mid-seventies.

FRANCES GAFFNEY: A woman in her early seventies.

PHOEBE ROSEN: A woman in her early seventies.

Place
A retirement community apartment.

Time
The present. Mid-afternoon.
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Setting: Lights come up on a comparable living/dining room area.

At Rise: ROGER is sitting on a comfortable chair, reading a book. There is a knock on the front door. ROGER walks to the door, opens it and FRANCES and PHOEBE are standing there. PHOEBE is carrying a small briefcase.

ROGER: May I help you?

FRANCES: Good afternoon. I'm Frances Gaffney and this is Phoebe Rosen. We're here to welcome you to your new home at Golden Acres Condos.

ROGER: That's very kind of you. I'm Roger Brantley.

PHOEBE: We know. The office sent us a note. If you're not busy, may we come in?

ROGER: Of course. I was just reading. I usually read in the afternoon.

FRANCES: Did you hear that, Phoebe? Doesn't nap in the afternoon. Mark it down on your list.

PHOEBE: Remind me when I get out my writing pad.

ROGER: Is there something wrong with that?

FRANCES: Most men in Golden Acres take a four-hour nap every afternoon.

PHOEBE: The last new man who moved in sleeps almost all day. He only wakes up for meals.

FRANCES: You get a grade A for sleeping habits.

ROGER: I'm being graded?
FRANCES: If you'll let us come in, we'll explain.

ROGER: Oh...excuse me. Please come in.

(Frances and Phoebe walk in and Roger closes the door behind them. Frances points to a small dining table around which are four chairs.)

FRANCES: May we sit at the table, Mr. Brantley?

ROGER: It's Roger. And please...sit down.

(Frances and Phoebe sit. Phoebe opens her briefcase, removes several forms, a writing pad and a ballpoint pen. She places them on the table. Roger remains standing.)

FRANCES: It will be much easier if you sit down with us.

ROGER: Is something wrong?

FRANCES: Not at all. We're collecting information for our data bank.

ROGER: Is whether I nap in the afternoon information for your data bank?

PHOEBE: It goes into your profile.

ROGER: Why do you want my profile?

FRANCES: I'm the joint chairperson of the Social Resources Conservation and Utilization Committee.

ROGER: That sounds very impressive.

PHOEBE: I'm the other joint chairperson.

ROGER: And you're both here to greet me? I feel very honored.

PHOEBE: That's not the only reason we're here.

ROGER: Why else?

PHOEBE: How old are you?
ROGER: Seventy-six.

FRANCES: You're perfect.

ROGER: For what?

PHOEBE: It's complicated.

ROGER: Maybe I should sit down.

(ROGER sits at the table.)

FRANCES: How would you like to contribute to the happiness of our community?

ROGER: Are you asking for money?

PHOEBE: Heavens, no. We want you to give of yourself.

ROGER: Like volunteering?

PHOEBE: Something like that.

ROGER: I've never done any volunteering. Too busy working before I retired.

FRANCES: This is a little different. It just takes some explaining.

ROGER: That would help.

FRANCES: I moved here nine years ago. Just after I turned sixty-two. It didn't take long to find out there was a serious problem. There was only one man for every seven women. The women were fighting over the few available men. Believe me, it was very ugly.

ROGER: I guess some of the men liked that.

FRANCES: Men don't know what they like.

PHOEBE: It takes a woman to tell a man what he likes.
ROGER: I'm not sure I agree with that.

FRANCES: Mark that down, Phoebe. Roger may be hard to handle.

ROGER: You've decided that already? You just met me.

PHOEBE: Frances isn't serious. She just likes to kid.

FRANCES: Thank you, Phoebe. I know our committee will be in good hands if I ever decide to retire.

ROGER: I don't mean to be rude, but will this take much longer? I'd like to get back to my book.

PHOEBE: Are you always so impatient? We're only trying to do a service for our community.

ROGER: I apologize. Please continue.

FRANCES: Back to where I was. Our community was like a war zone. You have no idea of the things our women would do to attract a new man.

ROGER: What would they do?

FRANCES: Don't ask. We don't like talking about it.

PHOEBE: Something had to be done...and we found a solution.

FRANCES: It was my idea.

PHOEBE: I actually had the idea before you suggested it.

FRANCES: Don't argue, Phoebe. We'll discuss it later.

ROGER: Don't keep me in suspense.

PHOEBE: We were surprised no one thought of it before.

ROGER: Thought of what?
FRANCES: A lottery.

ROGER: You mean like Power Ball?

PHOEBE: Something like that. But no one wins any money.

ROGER: Then what's the prize?

FRANCES: You are.

ROGER: What?!

FRANCES: Don't worry. You're not the prize in every drawing. Just our next scheduled lottery.

ROGER: Now I'm really confused. No one said anything about a lottery when I bought this apartment.

FRANCES: The Condo Association decided that mentioning it before someone purchases a unit here might interfere with the sale. So we wait until after the new owner moves in.

ROGER: Isn't that rather unfair?

FRANCES: Not to any of our women.

ROGER: How does it all work?

PHOEBE: When a single man over seventy moves into our community, we hold a lottery. So, in less than three weeks, some lucky woman is going to win you.

ROGER: Is this just a joke?

FRANCES: We're not here to play games. Don't misjudge how serious this is. Without the lottery, this place would be a war zone again.

ROGER: Do the women pay for lottery tickets?
PHOEBE: It's not free. An available man is worth more than that. Each woman, who wants to play, pays twenty-five dollars for a ticket. The winner receives an exclusive right to have a relationship with the new male resident.

ROGER: How many tickets are usually sold?

FRANCES: Somewhere between fifty and sixty.

PHOEBE: Most of them are unattached.

ROGER: Most of them? What's that mean?

PHOEBE: Some of our women are hoping to upgrade to a new partner. For them it's like shopping for a new dress.

ROGER: Do I have anything to say about this?

FRANCES: Of course not. If we allowed the men to become involved in the program, the lottery wouldn't work.

PHOEBE: France is right. Some things here have to be left to the women.

ROGER: It doesn't sound legal to me.

FRANCES: Are you a lawyer?

ROGER: No. But--

FRANCES: Roger. Take my advice. Don't try to challenge the system. One man tried that three years ago.

ROGER: What happened?

FRANCES: We don't like to talk about that. It wasn't very pretty.

ROGER: I'm sorry I asked. How long does this exclusive right last?

PHOEBE: Six months. During that period, he's hands-off for all the other women.
ROGER: What happens if the lucky woman doesn't win a man's affections within six months?

PHOEBE: We recycle the man.

ROGER: You throw him out with the trash?

FRANCES: You have a nice sense of humor, but no. We don't believe in wasting an available man. We have a second drawing. That winner gets a new six months' exclusive right to try to win the man.

ROGER: Does this go on forever?

FRANCES: We're not that unreasonable. After one year, he's free game. Anyone can pursue him.

ROGER: Won't that lead to the very situation you're trying to avoid?

PHOEBE: It's never happened. I don't want to disclose any secrets, but most of our women can be very convincing.

ROGER: And this is why you're taking my profile?

FRANCES: It's what makes the system work.

ROGER: Something about this whole thing doesn't smell right.

FRANCES: Would you buy a horse without knowing the medical history and the pedigree? We distribute your profile to all of the women. That helps them decide if they want to buy a lottery ticket.

ROGER: You're comparing men to horses?

FRANCES: Heavens, no. Have you ever heard of a horse you could buy for twenty-five dollars?

ROGER: Do you furnish a photograph so a woman can decide if she's interested?

PHOEBE: What a man looks like in his seventies isn't important. Having long term care insurance...that's important.
ROGER: That doesn't sound very romantic.

PHOEBE: At age seventy, enough money to pay for full-time nursing is very romantic.
ROGER: I never thought of it that way.

FRANCES: Phoebe, please give Roger a copy of the medical questionnaire.

(Phoebe hands some papers to Roger.)

FRANCES: You don't have to complete it now. We'll pick it up tomorrow.

ROGER: There must be ten pages here.

PHOEBE: Eleven.

ROGER: It looks familiar.

PHOEBE: A member of our committee used to work in a medical office. It was their new-patient form.

ROGER: (thumbing through the pages) You expect me to answer all these questions?

FRANCES: They're all important.

ROGER: Including how many times I've been pregnant.

FRANCES: Phoebe! I asked you to remove that question!

PHOEBE: You can't expect me to remember everything.

FRANCES: Make sure you correct that before the next man. For now, Roger, you can put a zero in the answer block.

ROGER: Before you go any further, I should tell you--

FRANCES: Please don't interrupt! It's important that we do this in the proper order.
PHOEBE: Frances isn't always right, but this time she is.

ROGER: But--

FRANCES: Phoebe...make a note. Roger seems to be very stubborn.

PHOEBE: *(writing on her pad)* Got it.

ROGER: I'm stubborn because I can't get a word in edgewise?

PHOEBE: You can say whatever you have to say when we're finished.

ROGER: Sorry. What else is there?

FRANCES: Your teeth. Are they real?

ROGER: I'm not going to answer that!

FRANCES: Phoebe...make a note. May have false teeth.

ROGER: I don't have false teeth!

FRANCES: Then why didn't you say that?

ROGER: I was drawing a line in the sand.

FRANCES: Phoebe, make a note. Roger is not always truthful.

PHOEBE: *(again writing on her pad)* I should have brought more paper.

ROGER: Why? Are there more questions?

FRANCES: Not really. Just your financial report. Phoebe will give you the forms to be completed. It's only six pages and we'll pick them up with your medical questionnaire.

*(PHOEBE hands the pages to ROGER.)*
ROGER: *(quickly glancing through the form)* Are you kidding? You can't expect me to provide this information!

PHOEBE: You don't have a choice.

ROGER: But my financial statement is private!

PHOEBE: A woman has the right to know who's picking up the check.

ROGER: Are you finished now?

PHOEBE: I think we've covered everything.

ROGER: Now may I speak?

FRANCES: Of course. We want to do everything we can to make you comfortable here.

ROGER: After I tell you what I have to say, you may change your mind about making me a prize.

FRANCES: I can't think of any reason that would happen.

ROGER: I'm gay.


BLACKOUT

THE END