

# It's Your Turn Now\*

FROM A PLAY BY ROSE BRASS

## Act I Scene I

*(An apartment living room furnished in heavy, dark, late twenties or early thirties furniture. A deep-maroon velvet chesterfield with lace doilies on rolled arms and back sits centre stage. A small, worn Axminster rug is on the floor in front of the couch. On the back wall is a window with curtains, to the right of it is a door leading into the kitchen.)*

*The entrance door of the apartment is stage left. To left and front of stage is a small secretary desk with tall back. In front of the desk is a Heppelwhite chair.*

*Totally incongruous with the rest of the apartment furnishings is a large, modern, silver floor lamp with a big, round, white plastic shade. This stands to right of couch, swooping almost over the back in a long arc.*

*Sadie Bowman, late seventies, plumpish, gray-haired, with wire spectacles and wearing a full apron over her clothes, is sitting on couch facing audience.*

*In front of her are two mime figures, a boy and a girl, clad in black tights and leotards. A game of jacks is in progress, and the boy is in possession of the imaginary ball. It rolls away from him; both figures move playfully to retrieve it. They are smiling.*

*Sadie leans forward on the couch, watching them. She too is smiling delightedly at their antics.*

*They scurry back to a spot in front of her and resume the game, only to lose the ball again.)*

Sadie:     *(pointing)* There it goes again. Get it . . . get it.

*(Boy mime runs and retrieves it. Sitting down, he bounces the ball and swoops up a fistful of jacks. He opens his hand and thrusts it toward Sadie, showing her his prize.)*

Sadie:     *(impressed)* Four at one time! That's very good!

*(Girl mime pulls on boy mime's sleeve, indicating it is her turn. He ignores her, pulls his arm away, and begins to play again.)*

Sadie: That's not nice. Be a gentleman; give her a turn.

*(Girl mime tries for ball again, boy half turns, still retaining ball. She cannot reach it and begins to cry.)*

Sadie: Tears over a ball? Believe me, it's not worth it. Watch, I'll show you what to do. *(addressing boy)* Give her the ball! *(He shakes his head no, vehemently.)* Give her the ball or I'm going to give you such a smack, your head will separate from your body — and she can play jacks with that!

*(Startled, boy turns and quickly gives ball to girl.)*

Sadie: *(pleasant)* That's better. Remember, everybody always has to take a turn.

*(Their discussion is interrupted by the sound of insistent knocking on the entrance door, accompanied by the impatient turning of the door handle. All eyes turn stage left. A voice is heard shouting.)*

Florence: Ma, open up; it's me, Florence.

*(The mimes pick up the jacks and silently exit stage right.)*

Sadie: *(getting up and moving quickly toward door)* I'm coming, I'm coming, Florence.

*(She opens door and her daughter Florence enters. She is a typical upper-middle-class matron in her early forties, blond hair, trim figure, chunky gold jewellery. She is wearing designer jeans, properly cuffed and creased, and high-heeled shoes with thick wooden platforms. Her scooped-necked pullover is peach-coloured, and the matching cardigan is draped over her back with sleeves knotted around her neck. She is carrying a bag of groceries. The effect is of breezy efficiency.)*

Florence: Well, it's nice to see you finally locked your door.

Sadie: *(looking down at lock)* I did?

*(Florence moves quickly into room and continues walking until she reaches centre stage. Sadie follows behind, talking.)*

Sadie: You must be a mind reader, Florence. I was just thinking about you. I was watching two small children playing jacks, and one of them looked like you when you were little. She cried just like you, too.

Florence: *(turning and looking at her mother)* Is that what you do all day, Ma, sit and look out the window?

Sadie: *(coyly)* Not exactly.

Florence: Do you ever go out any more?

Sadie: Naturally!

Florence: Do you shop?

Sadie: Of course I shop. I can't live on air!

Florence: *(shaking her head)* This place isn't good for you any more, Ma. Let me just put these groceries away and then we'll talk.

*(Florence walks around couch to the rear of the stage and through doorway into kitchen. She calls out in a loud voice.)*

Florence: I brought you some nice tomatoes. They were on sale.

Sadie: *(raising her voice)* But I can't eat what I've got already.

Florence: You'll eat them, you'll eat them, don't worry about it.

Sadie: *(pleading)* Take them home, Florence. I don't eat many tomatoes; they'll just rot.

Florence: I don't need them, Ma.

Sadie: *(softer)* And I do?

Florence: What?

Sadie: Nothing, nothing. Thank you for the tomatoes, Florence.

Florence: *(emerging from kitchen)* When was the last time you cleaned that fridge? *(shakes her head)* Ma, what's happening to you? I thought you were going to get a cleaning woman. The whole place is getting like a pigsty.

Sadie: God forbid!

*(There is a lull in the conversation. Florence moves about the apartment, straightening, picking up newspapers, etc. Sadie has sat down on the couch and appears lost in thought.)*

Sadie: Florence, do you ever think about the old days, here, with me and Pa. . . and Sydney, of course. You two used to fight so much of the time. It's amazing you talk to each other at all today.

Florence: We don't. You forget . . . Sydney lives a thousand miles away.

Sadie: *(ignoring the remark)* Do you remember the fights, Florence?

*(The mimes enter. Girl mime is running ahead of boy, he catches her and they tussle, rolling around on stage. Girl mime attempts escape, gets up on her knees, but before she can move further, boy mime grabs her pigtail. They freeze.)*

Sadie: Always the pigtail! Do you remember, Florence? *(Florence continues straightening)* Do you?!

Florence: What? Do I what?

Sadie: Remember.

Florence: Remember what?

Sadie: The time you were raped outside of Mo's Grocery Store!

Florence: *(finally listening)* WHAT!!

Sadie: *(primly)* So maybe it wasn't rape.

Florence: Ma, have you gone crazy? Why would you say something like that? It's living here alone, isn't it? Nobody to talk to. . . you're starting to lose your. . .

Sadie: *(holding up her hand)* Please, Florence, quiet. I said it because you never listen to me. If you would listen to me I wouldn't say things like that.  
*(Florence has picked up the scattered mail on the desk and is agitatedly sorting through it.)*

Florence: *(short)* Don't you ever open your mail?

Sadie: Once a year. . . on a special occasion.

Florence: *(not listening again)* If you would open it every day, it wouldn't accumulate like this. Here's a telephone bill that's two months overdue!

Sadie: I seem to recall that I wasn't allowed to write cheques any more. . . since I made that little mistake.

Florence: First of all, it wasn't a little mistake. You sent out a cheque that was supposed to be for five dollars and added three zeros to it!

Sadie: *(haughtily)* I was feeling generous. . . when I was writing them they got out on time, didn't they?

Florence: And second of all, stop trying to make me feel guilty about not visiting you more often.

Sadie: Me?

Florence: Yeah, you. You did that to me all the time when I was growing up. . . you were always. . .

Sadie: *(delighted)* So you *do* think about when you were little!

Florence: *(stares heavily at Sadie, speaks dead-voiced)* You . . . are . . . impossible!  
*(Girl mime runs offstage, returns quickly wearing a soft-pink chiffon skirt. She sits down beside boy and they turn so that they are presenting a profile to the audience, facing each other, in front of Sadie, who is still sitting on couch.)*

Florence: *(moving back to desk)* Where's your cheque book? I'm going to pay these right now.

Sadie: In the drawer.

Florence: *(pulls out drawer in small secretary and rum-*

*mages through it)* There's nothing in here except a bunch of junk.

Sadie: Well, maybe on the shelf, then.

Florence: *(looks, is becoming increasingly more agitated)* It's not on the shelf either. Can't you remember anything any more?!

Sadie: I remember your name is Mary. *(Florence turns quickly and gives her a deadly look.)* Excuse me, I'm sorry, it was just a little joke. Maybe in my purse?

Florence: Would you happen to know where that is?

Sadie: *(pointing)* By your foot.  
*(Florence reaches down, grabs purse angrily, opens it, and searches through in a ham-fisted manner, pulls out the cheque book, flips through it to make sure there are some cheques, closes the purse, and places it with some force back by the leg of the desk.)*

Florence: Do some knitting or something, Ma. This won't take long. *(She exits to the kitchen.)*

Sadie: *(addressing mimes)* I have been dismissed. If I told her my eyes weren't good enough to knit anymore. . . but I won't. *(takes off glasses and stares at them)* They're for show now. *(puts them back on, turns and stares after Florence)* My beautiful daughter . . . she thinks her blond hair is her talisman against growing old. I am afraid . . . I'm my daughter's pain in the ass *(boy and girl mime show shock at the language)* Don't look so shocked, I'm not innocent . . . You weren't here when my husband was alive, were you? *(mimes nod no)* He always used to say, "Sadie, I want to go before you." Usually I got my way in most things, but this time he outsmarted me . . . in full vigour . . . right to the end . . . he beckoned me with his finger . . . I leaned over him . . . "Just think, Sadie," he said, "no more lunches to pack." *(She sits and muses.)* He was not a handsome man, but you never really noticed that. I was fifteen when we met . . . at my cousin's wedding. *(Music starts in background. Mimes get up and begin acting out scene.)* I was wearing a pink georgette gown, full and light . . . and I had blond, blond hair . . . like Florence. He came right over to me and made a little bow, and said something which made me laugh . . . I don't remember what it was now. Then he reached out and took my hand . . . *(Mimes dance a love duet while Sadie watches, transfixed. Just as dance is ending, Florence's voice is heard. Mimes exit.)*

Florence: Ma! Ma! Ma, are you going deaf now? I said I'm finished, do you want some tea?

Sadie: I'm sorry, Florence. I wasn't listening. I was thinking about Pa.

Florence: *(entering)* You've got to stop that. We all miss him, but he's gone. . .

Sadie: *(dryly)* I noticed that.

Florence: Now look, don't get upset, but we've got to talk about it sometime. . .

Sadie: Tell me, do they pay you a commission?

Florence: What?

Sadie: I don't want to go there, Florence. I'm not ready yet. I can still manage on my own.

Florence: Yeah, I see how you manage . . . you don't clean up, you sit a whole day dredging up the past. It's because you have no friends, no stimulation, nothing to look forward to any more. You can't even look after paying your bills.

Sadie: That's because I made a mistake.

Florence: Not again, Ma, please.

Sadie: You never make mistakes? It seems to me the last time you were here you locked your keys in the car. That's very bad to be so forgetful.

Florence: *(angrily)* Are you comparing me with you? Do you know all the things I have on my mind . . . the house . . . Harry . . . the kids . . . you. Sometimes I don't even know what I'm doing.

Sadie: I know just how you feel.

Florence: You've just got yourself!

Sadie: That's true.

Florence: Ma, if you can't even look after yourself. . .

Sadie: Who said I can't?

Florence: *(losing all patience)* I say it. I say it, because it's true. Look at this place!

Sadie: *(looks around)* It looks okay to me . . . maybe the lamp could go. . .

Florence: Again with that lamp! You never liked Harry, did you?

Sadie: How did we get on your husband?

Florence: That was a gift, from him to you. I had nothing to do with it.

Sadie: Thank goodness! He should have saved his money. It doesn't go with the room.

Florence: Of course it doesn't go with the room . . . nothing would go with this room. It's straight out of the Depression. This is the twentieth century, Ma. Won't you try to

come into it?

Sadie: Funny you should mention that, Florence. The other day I was thinking. . .

Florence: Another recollection from the past?

Sadie: For years I thought I was born in the nineteenth century. You know why? *(doesn't wait for any reply)* Because I was born in 1905 . . . see, *nineteen* . . . but no . . . nineteen is twenty . . . twenty is twenty-one. . .

Florence: *(stares at her mother as though she has suddenly lost her sanity)* Ma. . .

Sadie: Wait, wait . . . eighteen is nineteen, seventeen is eighteen. So Pa, God rest his soul, explained it to me finally . . . "It's like religion, Sadie — it may not make sense, but you don't argue about it. Every time you say nineteen, think twenty." And that's what I do.

Florence: *(defeated)* What brought this all on?

Sadie: Well, because you said I wouldn't even try to come into the twentieth century . . . but I'm in it already . . . I've always been in it . . . I was born in it. So you see, my daughter, you again made a mistake. But I'm not going to take away any of your privileges.

Florence: *(nonplussed)* Ma, sometimes. . . *(shakes her head)* . . . sometimes you confuse the hell out of me!

Sadie: Don't swear.

Florence: I'll swear if I want to. This is the age of freedom. . .

Sadie: Freedom! That's a nice word. Did you ever try it . . . to be free? *(with emphasis)* It's very hard to do the things you want to do . . . for instance, this job I got. . .

Florence: What are you talking about . . . what job . . . a job at your age?

Sadie: Yeah, I'm going to be a granny disco dancer. *(Florence just stares intently at Sadie before replying.)*

Florence: Why are you doing this to me, Ma?

Sadie: They wanted mature ladies. . .

Florence: Are you trying to win a point?

Sadie: I'm just trying to do what I want to do.

Florence: *(very tired)* I know you're only joking, Ma. . .

Sadie: Who's joking . . . I saw a woman older than me on TV. . .

Florence: *(eyes closed)* Jesus Christ!

Sadie: Don't swear.

Florence: *(gritted teeth)* I'll swear if I want to.

Sadie: And I'll disco dance if I want to.

Florence: Over our dead bodies!

Sadie: What would you do . . . disown me?

Florence: We would commit you!

Sadie: I rest my case.

Florence: Okay . . . are you happy now? You made your point. I won't swear any more.

Sadie: You missed it.

Florence: What?

Sadie: My point.

Florence: Which is?

Sadie: That there are still things I want to do.

Florence: Like?

Sadie: *(defensively)* Like . . . learning how to dance.

Florence: *(softening)* There's no reason why you can't do that, Ma.

Sadie: *(beginning to smile)* There isn't?

Florence: Of course not . . . they do it all the time at the Good Age Club . . . they dance. . .

Sadie: They shuffle! And always waltzes!

Florence: Well, what do you expect at your age!

Sadie: My age, my age . . . Let me tell you something. Sometimes I've walked by a store and caught sight of myself in the window . . . only it isn't me . . . I look around to see who else is there . . . but there isn't anybody. . .

Florence: Of course not . . . what you see in that window is you.

Sadie: No, no, you don't understand . . . it is not me . . . it's an old lady. . .

Florence: Ma. . .

Sadie: No, listen to me. *(points to head)* It's not old in here. I wish I could turn myself inside out and show you.

Florence: *(She is now sitting at opposite end of the couch from Sadie. She puts her head in her hands.)* Don't do this to me, Ma, please. *(She remains frozen in that position. The mimes enter.)*

Sadie: *(addressing mimes)* What am I doing to her? I'm only trying to explain something. Why is it that only you two understand?

*(The boy pretends to turn the end of a skipping rope while the girl skips. Sadie begins to count in a singsong voice: ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty. The girl misses. Disappointed, she turns to Sadie, indicating that it is her turn. Sadie points to herself and mouths*

*"me?" Mime nods vigorously, indicating with her hands that Sadie should come. Sadie gets up. Florence looks at her. Sadie moves over to rope and begins to skip, smiling and counting.)*

Florence: What are you doing? *(louder)* Ma, what are you doing? *(gets up, stands in front of Sadie, and yells loudly)* Stop it! Stop it! *(She reaches forward and grabs Sadie, preventing her from jumping.)*

Sadie: *(breathless)* You want a turn, Florence?

Florence: *(disbelief)* What are you doing?

Sadie: I'm skipping rope.

Florence: *(incredulous)* Just like that? In the middle of our conversation you get up and start jumping up and down?

Sadie: *(still slightly breathless)* You see . . . I told you . . . now do you understand?

Florence: *(sounds angry, but is also frightened)* I want you to sit down . . . now!

*(Sadie sits. Florence sits beside her and takes her hand.)*

Florence: Ma, sometimes when people get older, they begin to do things that are a little *(searches for word)* . . . strange.

Sadie: I've seen that, Florence. *(confidentially)* You know that old man down the hall. . .

Florence: *(abrupt)* Ma, listen to me! I'm not talking about old men down the hall. What you just did . . . that's strange.

Sadie: What I? . . . but. . .

Florence: It's not normal.

Sadie: I was only skipping.

Florence: Where? Here? In the middle of your living room? Without a rope? Think about it, Ma. I want you to really think about it.

Sadie: *(after a pause)* Maybe I should have tried double-dutch.

Florence: *(totally out of patience)* Double-dutch? Can't you see what's happening to you?

Sadie: *(pleading)* You're making me old, Florence.

Florence: *(through clenched teeth)* Ma, I'm not making you anything. You are old! And your mind is getting tired. It can't cope any more.

Sadie: *(with force)* You're wrong! My mind copes the best way it can . . . and it lets me be who I am.

*(Lights dim slowly.)*

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\*This play won first prize in the Canadian Woman Studies/ Council of York Student Federation literary contest for 1982.