

SENIORITY
by Eric Ziegenhagen
Debbie (17) - Fiona (15)

The Play: *Seniority* was first produced at the Playwrights Horizons in New York City after being selected as one of the winners from the 1988 Young Playwrights Festival. Eric Ziegenhagen was sixteen when he wrote this short one-act play about two sisters who confront each other. Debbie seems to be a self-assured young woman. She is intelligent and very focused in what she wants. After graduation she's spending the summer in Europe, and then going to college in the fall. Her confidence is shaken, however, when she learns that her younger sister, Fiona (a freshman), has been dating Ian, a senior she, herself, had wanted to date at one time. Suddenly, all of Debbie's careful planning for the future doesn't seem to matter. Her insecurity about dating and Fiona's apparent success with boys leaves Debbie feeling lonely and confused. Ian's arrival on the scene complicates the situation. Ultimately, *Seniority* raises the question that troubles us all: "What's to become of me?"

The Scene: Midnight in the living room of a suburban home. Debbie has waited up for her younger sister, who has been out on a date.

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(DEBBIE is paging through a pamphlet. Offstage, a teakettle blows. DEBBIE exits to kitchen and comes back with a cup in her hands. A car is heard outside. DEBBIE exits to kitchen again. The car idles and then pulls away. DEBBIE reenters carrying another cup and the kettle. As FIONA enters, DEBBIE pours two cups of tea.)

FIONA: Hi.

DEBBIE: 'Morning.

FIONA: You're still up. It's late, isn't it?

DEBBIE: Midnight.

FIONA: Oh. I didn't wear my watch.

DEBBIE: I made you some tea.

FIONA: Thank you.

DEBBIE: Just was making some and figured you'd be back soon, so I made a little extra.

FIONA: Thank you.

DEBBIE: Dawn called for you tonight.

FIONA: What did you tell her?

DEBBIE: I said that you were going to be out late.

FIONA: She didn't ask where I was?

DEBBIE: She just wanted to know if you wanted to do something tomorrow.

FIONA: Did she ask where I was?

DEBBIE: No. I told her you were out.

FIONA: Good.

DEBBIE: So how was it?

FIONA: Fun. Really fun. What happened in here?

DEBBIE: What?

FIONA: All this mess.

DEBBIE: Bridge game. Grandmother Jessica's staying here. There's a bridge tournament at the Holiday Inn.

FIONA: Then why is this stuff here?

DEBBIE: She had some of her friends over.

FIONA: Why don't they just play over at the Holiday Inn if she's staying over there?

DEBBIE: The tournament's there, but she's staying upstairs. She's sleeping in the TV room. Don't worry about it, anyway, you won't

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have to clean it up. I'll take care of it.

FIONA (*noticing pamphlets*): What are these?

DEBBIE: Pamphlets I picked up today. European exchanges. Two weeks in Holland, two weeks in England. Room and board at universities in London and Amsterdam. Seventeen hundred dollars including everything except extra spending. There's time to study and time to tour. Four weeks to get away. Exactly the sort of thing I'm looking for.

FIONA: You were thinking of doing this alone?

DEBBIE: No. With a study group. Well, "alone" meaning not being with anyone I know, yeah, I guess.

FIONA: And you think Mom will let you do that?

DEBBIE: Yes, I do.

FIONA: I beg to differ.

DEBBIE: Oh. We'll see. If I'm going to be going away to college next year, I don't see why she wouldn't let me spend a few weeks by myself in Europe.

FIONA: Because it's dangerous, Debbie. Dangerous. I mean, Amsterdam...it's, it's heroin and hookers...guys in ugly trench coats who want to feed you sourdough bread with poison in it...get your purse stolen, bad rates on money exchange...

DEBBIE: I'd be careful. I'd know where not to walk.

FIONA: It's too dangerous, Debbie. She'll never let you go.

DEBBIE: Then where could I go that wouldn't be dangerous? Omaha? I could be an exchange student in Omaha, and then it would be okay?

FIONA: I didn't mean to start an argument, Debbie.

DEBBIE: It won't hurt to bring it up with Mom.

FIONA: True.

DEBBIE: I'm responsible and careful enough for it.

(*Pause.*)

DEBBIE: Does Mom know that you went out tonight?

FIONA: She knew that I went out...

DEBBIE: ...but not with a guy.

FIONA: Right. You didn't say anything, did you?

DEBBIE: No, but didn't he come in when he picked you up?

FIONA: No.

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DEBBIE: You just went out there and met him?

FIONA: Yeah. Is there something wrong—

DEBBIE: No, no, it's just whenever I've gone out on dates, it's always kind of cute and romantic to meet the parents. You know, he would always go in and shake hands with Mom or whatever when he picked me up.

FIONA: Why should a guy have to go through that trouble when Mom probably won't like him anyway?

DEBBIE: It's kind of a custom.

FIONA: And that's what you've done on dates.

DEBBIE: Yeah, I've done that. Once we even went into the house after going out to a movie and, well, all right, we didn't expect his parents to be home, but his mom made some cocoa, and we all stayed up late just talking. The three of us. It wasn't bad at all.

FIONA: When was this?

DEBBIE: Last year.

FIONA: When did you go out?

DEBBIE: I went to prom, Fiona, remember? I also went out a few times this summer.

FIONA: I don't remember that.

DEBBIE: It was while you were out in Phoenix visiting Dad, that's why.

FIONA: Oh, I see.

DEBBIE: So where did you go?

FIONA: We just went out to the mall and walked around and ate some dinner.

DEBBIE: You ate in the mall?

FIONA: That fifties place over by the movie theater. It has those pink neon...

DEBBIE (*overlapping*): Yeah, I know what you're talking about.

FIONA: ...lights in the window and an old Wurlitzer jukebox. The kind with little water bubbles going up the sides in different colors.

DEBBIE: Yeah.

FIONA: Real cute.

DEBBIE: Yeah.

FIONA: And then after that we went to a movie.

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DEBBIE: At the mall?
FIONA: Yeah, where else would you go?
DEBBIE: What did you see?
FIONA: What?
DEBBIE: What was the movie?
FIONA: Boring. Something real boring. Some horror movie. Didn't watch it much.
DEBBIE: Oh.
FIONA: So that's about it.
DEBBIE: That leaves about three hours to spare.
FIONA: You don't have to clock my every moment, Debbie.
DEBBIE: Just curious, that's all.
FIONA: We drove around a little. Went out around the outskirts of town. You know, you can't see many stars around here, but way out on Highway Nineteen, past the suburbs and into the country, there were so many stars, I couldn't believe it. Not just the Big Dipper. Ones you can't see from here. And it's such a beautiful night out. Not too chilly. A thin, cool wind. Crickets. We just laid in some field by the side of the road, breathing the air and watching the stars. It was romantic and fun. What else is a date supposed to be?
DEBBIE: You did it, didn't you?
FIONA: We just went out, Debbie. A date.
DEBBIE: I knew I could see something even when you came in here. You're light.
FIONA: I can't be happy?
DEBBIE: You're more than happy...
FIONA: Sure we kissed, but—
DEBBIE: More than that. I can see it, Fiona. You're transparent.
FIONA: You're wrong.
DEBBIE: Right through you.
FIONA: Debbie.
(Long pause.)
FIONA: And so what if I did? So what if I "did it"? What then? You're just jealous, Debbie. You wish that you were in my place. Not with him, maybe, but with anyone. Anyone under the stars.
DEBBIE: That's not true!

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FIONA: Anyone that would offer it!
DEBBIE: I've had the—
FIONA: But no one asks you, so you just wait and wait and wait, and now you're jealous. I can read you, too. You envy me because I had a chance that you never did.
DEBBIE: I've had the opportunity, Fiona. I just didn't take it. It wasn't like he was so sure about it either.
FIONA (overlapping): Who?
DEBBIE: He asked if it would seem right and I said that it wouldn't.
FIONA (overlapping): Who?
DEBBIE: And it didn't seem right. It was that simple. And he understood. He gave me a choice.
FIONA: I didn't do it against my will...
DEBBIE: I know.
FIONA: ... we wanted to and we did.
DEBBIE: And when you miss your period next month and end up with a little embryo inside of you, you'll know something about taking chances.
FIONA: We were careful.
DEBBIE: But let's say something went wrong and something happened to sneak inside you and you get pregnant. Then you'll be a mommy. And our mother will be a grandma. And this man, this *guy*, this *guy* whose middle name you probably don't even know, will be the father. And you'll both have to take care...
FIONA (overlapping): We were careful.
DEBBIE: ...of it for the next eighteen years.
FIONA: There would always be abortion or adoption or something. Anyway, I'm not pregnant.
DEBBIE: How can you be sure?
FIONA: We were careful.
DEBBIE: The point is... Fiona, the point is *responsibility*. I don't think you're responsible enough—
FIONA: We were responsible enough to be careful, so I don't care how you feel about it. It's none of your business.