A Synopsis of *“Prelude to a Kiss”*

It’s New York, 2019. A single, solitary 32-year-old, Peter, is leaving a party thrown by his co-worker, Taylor. It’s late and he just wants to go home. As he leaves, Taylor introduces him to a neighbour on his floor, Rita. She is also single. She’s 26. Peter hesitates to engage in conversation with her; he really wants to go home. But, in a life changing moment, he decides to be polite; he engages. Their conversation is easy, fun. As he tells the audience (breaking the fourth wall) at the end of his short scene with her, “the spell was cast”.

The next afternoon, Peter goes to where Rita works, the Tin Market bar; they continue to explore each other’s pasts. She says, “we can go up to my place if you want”; the mutual courtship continues during their walk to her apartment and into the evening there. They see each other every night for the next six weeks. Then she suggests that he meet her parents. He asks her if she will marry him. She answers, “Uh-huh”. He can’t believe his good fortune.

Peter survives the ‘meet the parents’ and the wedding is on.

After they are married in the parents’ backyard, an old man who has been watching the young couple comes forward and asks if he may kiss the bride. She says she’d be flattered. They kiss. “There is a low rumble which grows in volume as they begin to kiss. Wind rushes through the trees, leaves fall, no one moves except for Rita, whose bridal bouquet slips to the ground. The Old Man and Rita separate, and the wind and rumble die down.” We realize, before any of the characters do, that Rita and the Old Man have switched bodies.

Peter and the Old Man (as Rita) honeymoon in Jamaica. Peter tells us after their first day together that Rita “seemed like a different Rita”. On their last night of the honeymoon, while walking on the beach, he confronts her: “I want you to be you, Rita, I want you!” She responds, “I am me. This is all I am. I’m sorry I can’t be whatever you want me to be. This is me. And maybe what you saw wasn’t here at all.” So ends Act 1.

Things don’t go any better for Peter at the top of Act 2. Rita’s parents don’t share Peter’s concern. Rita’s Dad: “Well, you’re married now. And you’re dealing with a slippery entity there…You’ll get used to her. She’s young.” Peter decides to confront Rita (the Old Man): “Where is she? Please. I won’t be angry. You can go back wherever you came from and I won’t tell a soul, you don’t have to tell me who you are. Just tell me where Rita is and we’ll pretend this never took place.”

Rita (the Old Man) says nothing, and Peter decides he has to find the Old Man.

He finds him in the Tin Market. Rita proves that she is the Old Man now by answering questions that only she would know the answers to. Meanwhile, because Peter confronted her, Rita (the Old Man) decides to leave Peter and return to her parents’ home, telling her parents that Peter is suffering from delusions and that she wants a divorce or annulment.

Peter and the Old Man (who is Rita) spend the next six days in Rita’s apartment as “the old couple we’d become”.

We learn from the Old Man’s daughter that her father has lung cancer and doesn’t have a year to live. Rita is trapped, it would seem in an old man’s decaying body.

Rita suggests confronting the Old Man, who obviously wants to live out the rest of his life as her. With Rita’s Mom’s help, they trick Rita into returning to her apartment.

The Old Man, as Rita, confesses “I don’t know how it happened. I don’t know what I did…I wanted it, that’s all…I wished to God I were that young bridegroom starting out. Or the bride, for that matter.” Rita counters, “And you kissed me and, let me be over there please, let me skip the hard part. I wanted to be you. For one second of one day, what would it be like to just be…not afraid.”

They say together, “All you’ve got to do is want it. Bad enough.” And then, “Their eyes lock. The light in the room dims as if the sun outside were obscured by a cloud---a low rumble.” They’ve switched back. The Old Man leaves, as himself, telling the young couple, “Do yourselves a favor: floss.”

As Peter and Rita embrace, she says, “I’m here. I’m not afraid.” Peter responds, “I know...Oh Rita. Never to be squandered…the miracle of another human being.”

“They clasp one another. Music begins to play. Vocalist:

“How my love song gently cries

For the tenderness within your eyes.

My love is a prelude that never dies:

My prelude to a kiss.”