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ACCEPTABLE RANGE

Monologues / Drama / 2-3 min
Cast 1 Female x1

A retired nurse gets three minutes at a town meeting to argue against closing the local clinic. The council has a report full of numbers and a hospital forty minutes away. She has one night from 1986 that she has never stopped timing.

CHARACTERS

RUTH ANN - late 60s, a retired nurse who worked at the town clinic for thirty-four years and still knows where the keys are

SETTING

A high school cafeteria set up as a town meeting hall, present day, a weeknight evening.

A high school cafeteria doubling as a town meeting hall. A folding table of council members at the front. A microphone on a stand. RUTH ANN, late 60s, walks to it with a folded piece of paper she never opens.

RUTH ANN

Ruth Ann Kessler. Forty-one Mill Road. I'm told I get three minutes, so I'll talk fast, and I'd appreciate it if you'd let the clock run a little if I get going.

I was a nurse at the clinic for thirty-four years. Retired six years ago. I still know where the key to the supply closet is, if that tells you anything.

Now, I've read the report. I know the numbers. Eleven patients a day on average. Building needs a roof. County hospital is forty minutes if you drive it right, and the report says that's "within acceptable range."

(beat)

I wanna tell you about acceptable range.

In 1986 there was no clinic. There was me. I was the nurse who lived in town, so when something happened, people came to my house. That was the system. My kitchen.

And one night in March a truck pulls into my driveway with the horn going, and it's the Pruitt boy, and in the passenger seat is his sister, Dana. Seventeen. They'd rolled the car out on Route 9. She was talking. She was talking to me. She asked if her mom was gonna be mad about the car.

I called the county. Ambulance was coming. And I got her on my kitchen floor with towels and I held pressure where I could and I kept her talking. About the car. About prom. About anything.

Fifty-two minutes. That's how long it took. I know because I watched the clock over my stove the whole time. And she stopped talking at about thirty.

She grips the podium.

We built that clinic four years later. Bake sales. A bond some of you voted for. Your parents did. And I don't know if it would've saved her. Nobody can tell you that. But it would've had a real table, and real light, and two hands that weren't mine.

You keep saying nobody uses it. Eleven a day. I know. I know that number better than you do.

(quieter)

That's what it's for. It's not for the eleven. It's for the one. It's for the night somebody's seventeen and talking to you about her mom.

You wanna close it, close it. But don't call forty minutes acceptable to me. I've timed it.

She folds the paper once more and steps back from the microphone.

That's my three minutes.

END OF SCRIPT