

# John Caine

<http://www.johncaine.net> — John Caine, writer and journalist – Review

## Reunion

by John Caine

This is the second play in the West End within this week about assisted suicide. *An Instinct for Kindness* has been touring and reached the West End this week at Trafalgar Studios. There have been several plays being performed on this subject which reflects its significance within an ageing society, where living into the 80s has become the norm. Keeping people alive despite the quality of their life seems to be the criteria for the law, but not necessarily by people with incapacitating terminal illnesses. *An Instinct for Kindness* is a true story, based on the actor's own very moving experience which I've already reviewed. John Caine's play at Jermyn Street may be fiction, but renders true in its description. "You think I don't know how precious life is? I used to have one," says Raymond Dean who cannot bear his complete physical dependency on his wife Antonia. He needs her help to end his useless pointless life which he cannot do on his own. Confined to a motorised wheel chair because of his neurone disease, scarcely capable of holding a cup, drinking food through a straw, and having to be toileted, all of which is a loss of dignity for a once powerful lawyer, makes him sure of his decision to end his life. Antonia is a Catholic and cannot accept this mortal sin. As a lawyer, Raymond is well versed in the current law, but Antonia is not concerned with the law. Not until the end of the play do we come to understand the full meaning of mortal sin for Antonia....in taking his life, she will take her own. The play is a static piece but in the staging by Anthony Biggs, he illustrates in such real terms the routines in their domestic life with rhythmic pacing in a steady flow of perfect timing so beautifully interpreted by Roberta Taylor as Antonia. A muted mood like a chamber work is created one moment with an easy change into the next. Biggs directs the contrasting relationship between Raymond and Antonia, their ups and downs, their confessions, and Antonia's dilemma of facing suicidal death, with great sensitivity. Raymond's isolation plus being overlooked by relatives and close friends because of their busy lives cannot be compensated by Antonia alone. A very detailed kitchen emphasises the ordinariness of their lives in which Raymond's clever manipulation of his motorised chair becomes a metaphor indicating how clear-headed he still remains under these demeaning circumstances. Peter Guinness both vocally and physically captures the exhaustion of this man coping with his condition yet at the same time revealing his determination and humour. As Angela, Roberta Taylor is so subtle in hiding the turmoil of her emotions behind an efficient and cheerful front. She carries the play like Trojan and projects such a winning person. As they recall past memories (among them a shag in a phone box) or dig up old infidelities that still hurt, or carry on about a neglectful daughter, or a still-born birth, a very real-life couple comes to life...such perfect casting. Here is a play without action based on truthful emotions and dialogue to carry the progression that proves how important the word

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is in the art of theatre and that the role of the director is to conduct that language like music in order to make it come alive.