

ACT I

The play takes place inside and outside an affluent suburban home in New Jersey on a hot summer day in the late seventies. The downstage area serves as both the street in front of the house and the patio/pool area behind. A pool ladder and projections on a scrim or curtain might help set those scenes.

A playroom upstage, with a couch prominent, a bar behind, and a television. Other furnishings as needed. A stairway stage left climbs to the door to the kitchen. Another door stage right leads to the unfinished half of the basement.

(Lights rise on the street to reveal a hot, sunny summer morning. We hear a distant lawn mower, the whirl of old fashioned sprinklers, a car or two driving past, a dog barking hysterically across the street... and then music, a tinny AM broadcast of "Hold On, I'm Comin" by Sam and Dave... as Walter, a public service meter reader, enters, listening to the earphones of his transistor radio. Dark haired and chunky, he wears shorts, white socks, comfortable shoes, a laminated identity card, and a lightweight pith helmet. He stops, studies the numbers on his clipboard and jots a notation or two, as the song concludes, and we hear the riff of an overly caffeinated morning disk jockey...)

DISK JOCKEY

It's eight twenty-two in the a.m. here at WJNJ. We got the hot ones here, and it's gonna be a hot one out there today. Good day to play hooky and head for the beach, or just hang by the pool and suck down a Billy Beer... and speaking of pools, our favorite sponsor is here, swinging in on his vine right now...

(Walter smiles, listens... He likes this guy.)

VOICE OF JUNGLE BOB

(a Tarzan-like jungle man)

Hi, this Jungle Bob. Summer here! Time to float in pool like hippo. Ahhhhhh... Cool off wife. Wrestle crocodile. Be happy... Oh! No got pool in backyard? No problem! Bob buildum you one!

(MORE)

VOICE OF JUNGLE BOB (Cont'd)

You come visit Jungle Bob's Pools, Route 46 in Totowa right next to Shoe Town. Big pool. Little pool. Bob gottum. You gettem! Ooga ooga!

DISK JOCKEY

Ooga-ooga! Now here's something new from the love of my life... Miss Donna Summer...

(Walter pulls off his earphones... and the radio cuts out. He wipes his brow, glances up at the blazing sun, flips down his sunglasses, and continues on his way, entering a yard...)

WALTER

(calling out)

Public Service!

(He exits stage left, as the sunlight dims, and the lights rise upstage, revealing...)

(The playroom, cool and dark in comparison to the street outside. Sunlight streams in through a casement window. Someone lies on the couch, wrapped in a blanket in a semi-fetal position. No head is visible, but a pair of bare feet are seen sticking out. We hear a moan... the feet move... and Connie unwraps herself and sits up, waking from a rough night's sleep. In her mid to late thirties, she's attractive, even beautiful, but a mess... in an obviously depressed state.)

CONNIE

Fuck.

(Wrapping the blanket around herself, she stands, shivers, and shuffles aimlessly around the room for a minute. She finds a soda can, shakes it to see if there's anything left in it... There isn't. Then she finds an almost finished bag of cheese doodles, shuffles back to the couch, sits again, and eats the remnants, deeply unhappy. Suddenly she hears *footsteps* crossing the floor above and freezes, listening. A beat... and Robert calls out from upstairs.)

ROBERT

(offstage)

Connie?

(She doesn't respond.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

Con?

(Another beat... and the door at the top of the stairs opens.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

(above, unseen)

Connie?

(She wraps the blanket around herself and stares into nothing... as Robert, a handsome, very fit guy in a summer suit, comes down the stairs. He sees her and, for a long moment, just looks at her.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

Getting dressed today?

(beat)

It's been a week of this.

(beat)

I asked a simple question. I expect a simple answer.

(She stares, says nothing.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

You know, Con, I go to work every day. I pay the bills. I wear a tie. I'm a good provider. A good lay.... a pretty good lay... an okay lay...

(beat)

I can get it up at least seventy per cent of the time...

(beat)

Fifty per cent...

(beat)

Okay, twenty-eight per cent... Hey, I got it up on our honeymoon, Con...

(beat)

At least I tried.

(She stares, says nothing.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

By the way... for your information... there's no food in the house... The cupboard is bare.

(beat)

I said the fucking cupboard is bare.

(She stares.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

You know, Con, we said 'til death do us part. Maybe it's time for one of us to make the supreme sacrifice.

(beat)

Let's duke it out. Odds or evens, Con? Loser dies... or lives. Whichever...

(MORE)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

(beat)

Odds or evens?... Odds or evens, Con?

(She stares.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

You know what? I'm through feeling guilty about this. I made a mistake. I 'fessed up. I made a clean breast of it. Now it's over. It's history. It's yesterday's lunch.

(means it)

Get dressed!

(She stares.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

I'll give you 'til the count of three. One... Two... Two point one... Two point four... Don't make me say three, Con... Don't make me do it...

(beat)

Three.

(beat)

I'll make it four, Con. For old time's sake.

(She stares.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

What do you want to do?

(beat)

Do you want to end it? Is that what you want? Do you want to just pull the plug? Because it's not like there's anything holding us together here. It's not like we have future generations to think of.

CONNIE

(quietly)

Fuck you.

ROBERT

Wish you would.

(Robert exits up the stairs, leaves the kitchen door open. Connie just sits there, motionless... staring.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

(upstairs, singing)

Oh give me a home where the buffalo roam
And the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard an intelligent word,
And my wife's in her pee jays all day.
Home, home sure is strange.
La da dee, la da da da da dee...

(beat)

Connella?

(MORE)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

(beat)

Buttercup?

(beat)

Love bite?

(She doesn't respond.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

I can't find the bread... Don't we have any bread?... I'm the breadwinner, and I wants my bread!... Toast! Toast! My kingdom for a piece of toast!

(The sound of a cabinet door being slammed hard.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

(sings, to the tune of "Norwegian Wood")

I once had a wife, or should I say, she once had me. Bwong bwang bwong bong.

(There is a *knock* at the backdoor upstairs. Connie listens, as the following is heard from upstairs.)

WALTER

(off)

Public service!

ROBERT

(off)

Oh thank God.

(opens the door)

Come on in.

WALTER

(off)

Phew! Gonna be a scorcher out there.

ROBERT

(off)

Uh-huh... Right through there. Careful on those stairs. Let me get that light for you.

(The light turns *off*. Connie doesn't move.)

WALTER

Thanks.

ROBERT

She doesn't bite.

WALTER

What?

ROBERT

Nuthun.

WALTER

Is there an animal down there?

ROBERT

No no no no no no no. I don't know why I said that. Love your hat. Right down there.

(Connie doesn't move. Walter comes down the stairs in the dark.)

WALTER

(quietly, meaning Robert)

Dickhead.

(Walter flips up his sunglasses and looks around in the half light, unaware that Connie is there. He takes a private moment, enjoying the coolness of the place, snooping around, coming very close to her, without ever being aware of her, then he passes through the door into the basement.)

ROBERT

(a whisper from the top of stairs)

Connie?

(flicks the upstairs light on and off excitedly)

Ooga-ooga!

(Connie listens as Robert's footsteps fade into another part of the house. A beat, and then Walter steps out of the basement... sees her... and jumps.)

WALTER

Oh!... Sorry... Didn't see you. Were you there before? I... didn't... see you...

(She says nothing.)

WALTER (Cont'd)

(uncomfortable)

At least it's... cool down here... They said on the radio it could hit a hundred. Might set a record...

(beat)

For the day...

(She says nothing.)

WALTER (Cont'd)

But it's nice down here.

(MORE)

WALTER (Cont'd)

'Cause it's subterranean... Partially. The earth always keeps things cooler... except in winter... when it keeps them... warmer...

(uncomfortable)

Well... uhhh... nice... talking with you.

(He starts to leave, just as *footsteps* approach across the floor upstairs.)

CONNIE

Wait.

(Walter stops. A long beat. He wants to say something, but she puts her finger to her lips, shooshing him.)

ROBERT

(from upstairs, a whisper)

Connie?

(then louder)

Connie?

CONNIE

Jawohl?

ROBERT

I go.

CONNIE

Goom-bye.

ROBERT

(beat)

What are you doing?

(She doesn't answer.)

ROBERT (Cont'd)

What are you doing?

CONNIE

Nuttin'.

ROBERT

Did the meter guy leave?

CONNIE

Uh-huh.

ROBERT

I didn't hear the door.

CONNIE

He climbed out the window.

ROBERT

What?

CONNIE

He fucked me. I gave him all your power tools... and he climbed out the window. He told me to tell you "Thanks".

(Walter is *dying*.)

ROBERT

Okay. Look, if the house burns down, just stay inside.

CONNIE

You got it.

(The door at the top of the stairs closes. *Footsteps* cross the floor. Connie just listens.)

WALTER

(in a whisper)

One of those days, huh?

(Connie says nothing.)

WALTER (Cont'd)

Been married long?

(Connie says nothing. A big door closes upstairs.)

WALTER (Cont'd)

There he goes...

CONNIE

Hi-ho... Hi-ho.

END OF SAMPLE