

CARE

A short comedy in ten Schnitzleresque scenes
by P.R.Berton

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Cast of Characters

HUSBAND

WIFE, HUSBAND's wife.

SOLITARY, with a sunburn on his back.

STRANGER, a relatively well-known TV actor.

NERD, wearing a bathing suit with Robin's face.

Note: there are three pairs of characters that never appear together in the same scene allowing both roles to be played by the same actress or actor: Wife & Solitary, Husband & Stranger, Stranger & Nerd, depending on what the director wants to suggest with this doubling.

Place

A Beach

Time

Summer

SCENE 1

HUSBAND

(Reading from a magazine.)

To be immortal or to have all the money in the world?

WIFE

(Turning to HUSBAND.)

What?

HUSBAND

Being immortal or...

(Lowering the magazine and looking at WIFE.)

are you willing to take this test or not?

WIFE

Hmm... I don't know... it's kind of boring.

(HUSBAND drops the magazine in the sand with some anger.)

WIFE

You have already asked more than forty questions.

(Short pause.)

WIFE

Tired.

(Short pause.)

HUSBAND

See that guy over there applying sunscreen?

WIFE

(Turning to SOLITARY who is offstage.)

What's wrong with him?

HUSBAND

He is alone.

WIFE

So?

(HUSBAND looks at WIFE pissed off.)

WIFE

Do you feel sorry for him?

HUSBAND

He doesn't have anyone to put the protector on his back.

WIFE

Oh, it's true. Look how red he is.

(Short pause. WIFE looks at HUSBAND.)

WIFE

Oh, no!

HUSBAND

Will you want *me* to go there?

WIFE

Well, it's less weird than if *I* go, right?

(Falsely kind.)

Hello, do you mind if I apply sunscreen on your back?

(Looks at SOLITARY.)

He doesn't seem to be interested in men.

HUSBAND

We never know that.

WIFE

Don't worry, he won't grab your dick.

HUSBAND

(Looking disapprovingly at WIFE.)

I just think it gets less weird if a woman offers to put sunscreen on a man.

WIFE

Sexist.

(HUSBAND takes a long breath.)

WIFE

And if I get there, people will think I'm easy to get.

(Short pause.)

WIFE

A whore.

(Looks at SOLITARY.)

But his skin is so red. It will peel soon. Unless he gets a second degr...

(HUSBAND gets up from the beach chair and goes quickly towards SOLITARY.)

WIFE

Wait!

(HUSBAND leaves. Short pause.)

WIFE

He's gone. Too late.

SCENE 2

HUSBAND

Are you ok?

(SOLITARY in the easy yoga pose looks at HUSBAND without understanding the meaning of the question.)

HUSBAND

No, you know what, me

(Indicating with his head.)

and my wife over there...

(SOLITARY leaves the yoga pose, turns around and shakes his head to WIFE, who is offstage, still not understanding the situation.)

HUSBAND

...we noticed that you are alone.

(SOLITARY looks at HUSBAND with the look of someone waiting for an explanation.)

HUSBAND (embarrassed.)

And then there are parts of the body that...

(SOLITARY looks at his own genitals.)

HUSBAND (hurriedly.)

No, not at all!

SOLITARY

Not what?

HUSBAND

It's the back.

SOLITARY

The back?

HUSBAND (abashed.)

Oh, my God...we, my wife and I, we saw that you were not able to apply the sunscreen right in the middle of your back and that it is already very red, because you must have come to the beach several times alone and must not have been able to put the sunscreen on that region.

(SOLITARY looks at HUSBAND surprised.)

HUSBAND

Do you mind if I put it on you?

(HUSBAND and SOLITARY stare at each other for a while.)

SOLITARY

Ah!

(SOLITARY takes the sunscreen and reaches for HUSBAND.
HUSBAND takes the sunscreen reading the label.)

SOLITARY

Sorry, I didn't get you.

HUSBAND

I know. It's... unusual.

SOLITARY (carefully pausing between words.)

Your wife...

(Accelerated.)

she's your wife, right?

HUSBAND

(Looking at the sunscreen.)

But this factor is very low. You have very fair skin.

SOLITARY

I bought the cheapest one. I don't really like smearing myself with sunscreen.

HUSBAND

(Giving the protector back to SOLITARY.)

So let's do this. Let me take a dip and when I get out of the water I'll get ours. If we were closer I'd take it now, but my wife always prefers to stay far back away from the water. Could it be like that?

SOLITARY

Of course.

HUSBAND

Until then.

(Leaves towards the sea.)

(SOLITARY watches HUSBAND walking away.)

SCENE 3

(WIFE looks towards HUSBAND who is talking to SOLITARY, these two last ones offstage. WIFE greets SOLITARY shaking her head. WIFE is thoughtful for a moment. STRANGER approaches and stands next to WIFE. WIFE notices STRANGER's presence and gets frightened.)

STRANGER

Calm down. I'm not a burglar.

(WIFE looks at STRANGER still a little breathless.)

STRANGER

You by any chance would have a bottle opener?

WIFE

I was here... thinking about life... and out of nowhere a man appears by my side...

STRANGER

Sorry. It was not my intention. The truth is that couples are always more organized than singles and they take everything to the beach.

WIFE

That's what you think. My husband always forgets to bring half of the things. And that parasol is over five years old. It's even moldy.

(Points to the inner part of the parasol.)

See that corner over there? Wow, the rod is already rusting!

(Looks at STRANGER.)

What do you need again?

(STRANGER stares at WIFE.)

WIFE

You may not be a burglar, but you look like a sex maniac.

(Laughs, trying to hide the laughter.)

STRANGER

Neither a burglar, nor a sex maniac. I'm an actor. A TV actor.

WIFE

And I am a university professor. I watch very little television. I don't have time for that and to tell you the truth, most programs are utterly stupid.

(Short pause.)

STRANGER

And would you by any chance have a bottle opener?

(Short pause.)

WIFE

But doesn't the guy from the food stand back there have one?

(STRANGER looks at WIFE with a sly smile on his mouth.)

WIFE

The one in the sea that has just passed the surf is my husband.

STRANGER

I've been carefully watching you for hours. I fancied you.

WIFE

Do I look like someone who gets along with anyone? I didn't put sunscreen on the guy over there so the whole beach doesn't think I'm a whore and now a guy appears who's more or less suggesting that.

STRANGER

I didn't suggest anything. I'm just saying that I was attracted to you, the day is hot and I would love to have fun with you.

WIFE

And I found it strange that my husband ended up not applying the sunscreen... I don't know what happened...

(WIFE looks towards the sea where HUSBAND is offstage and waves at him.)

WIFE (seriously.)

I've never done this before. And we don't have a bottle opener.

STRANGER

(Touching his cell phone.)

What's your wapp or snap?

(Looks at her.)

Does the hubby usually snoop around and see who called or texted you?

WIFE (cornered.)

No.

STRANGER

Go. Say it.

WIFE

But... we... where... I'm confused... this is going too fast!

SCENE 4

HUSBAND

(In the sea, trying to stay on the water's surface, with some effort.)
There was a period in the history of Drama when monologues were practically forbidden, because nobody talks to himself. So, the role of the confidant was created, that is, the one who listens to the protagonist and advises, instructs and corrects mistaken or immoral thinking, in the form of dialogue. This character, however, according to the great Lukács,

(Looks at the audience in a blasé way.)

was disappearing as the concept of a single identity crumbles in the modern world and trust between human beings is eroded. I would even like to have someone to share my anguish, but it turns out that the author put me alone here in the middle of the sea and now there's no one for that. I confess that I found that guy sitting in a yoga position, almost inside the sea, strange. I wonder if the sunscreen might not be a strategy to attract someone to the web that he must set up every day in search of another body.

(Waves at WIFE who is offstage with some difficulty.)

And meanwhile she gets a little visitor. From here you can't see who it is, but it must be an acquaintance. But why doesn't he sit down if he's an acquaintance and stands instead? And now he starts to touch his cell phone while talking to her?

SCENE 5

STRANGER

(Sitting down on SOLITARY's side on the sand.)

I came here to make a deal with you. You never come here?

SOLITARY (suspicious.)

First time.

STRANGER

If you're after a jock, you've come to the wrong place.

SOLITARY (amused.)

After a jock?

STRANGER

You don't fool me. I've been watching everything back there since you arrived. The way you looked everywhere, the way you spread your towel, your sitting position, it seemed like a code, a dance. You even managed to catch a fish. However this one doesn't seem to belong as much in your school of fish. Only couples and families come here.

SOLITARY

Do you always talk like that?

STRANGER

I took an oratory course. For those who are an actor, it always helps.

SOLITARY

Ah, your face was not entirely unknown to me.

STRANGER

Entirely?

(Short pause.)

STRANGER

Here's the thing. You hold the guy as long as you can and arrange anything with him tonight.

SOLITARY

(Laughing.)

Let's say I'm a faggot and he's interested. He's married. And his wife is back there.

STRANGER

He is not into fucking you. He feels sorry for you. It even makes it easier.

(SOLITARY breaks out in laughter.)

STRANGER

I make it up to you.

SOLITARY

For a comedy actor, you're doing very well.

STRANGER

Do you accept the challenge or not?

SOLITARY

How do you make it up?

STRANGER

I fuck you.

SOLITARY

What if I'm not a faggot like you think I am?

STRANGER

Then we can think of another type of compensation.

(Looks towards the sea.)

Oh, he's coming out of the water and he's going to come here to put the sunscreen on you.

Then I come back later to see what happened.

(Leaves.)

SCENE 6

NERD

Excuse me?

(WIFE looks at NERD, who is wearing a bathing suit with Robin's face, Batman's companion.)

NERD

I won't be long, because this play can only have ten pages and this is already the sixth one.

WIFE

And the playwright decided to include one more character when the notice is very clear in relation to the limit of four.

NERD

Four *actors*, not characters. And furthermore, if the idea is the theater of the impossible, a husband giving a monologue in the middle of the sea explaining the impossibility of dialogue according to the modern conception of the human being, with his fragmented and multiple identity à la Stuart Hall...

WIFE

Enough! Quoting Lukács and making a blasé look at the audience that is only after a good story, a causal dramatic structure that is consciously not perceptible, was enough.

NERD

I want his autograph.

WIFE

Whose, Lukács?

(She laughs loudly.)

Hey, just go ask.

(Pointing towards STRANGER who is offstage.)

There he is, look.

NERD

I'm a shy guy.

WIFE

And ugly.

NERD

Which only increases my shyness and makes you a prejudiced woman. When you guys go fuck tonight, ask for the autograph and deliver it to me here on the beach tomorrow.

WIFE

Who says I'm going to fuck him and I'm not leaving before tomorrow?

NERD

Me. You can tell by the look on your face that he made you let's say...
(Slowly.)

interested.

(At normal speed of speech.)

And you appear to be a bourgeois couple who take a standard vacation of at least a week.

(WIFE looks at NERD dumbfounded.)

NERD

And if you don't have my autograph in hand tomorrow at the same bat-time and on the same bat-channel, I'll tell your husband everything. And he will believe.

(HUSBAND comes in from the sea all wet and greets NERD who returns the greeting and leaves. HUSBAND looks at WIFE. WIFE puts on the sunglasses and looks in the other direction.)

SCENE 7

STRANGER

(Walking at the seashore in a sloppy but premeditated way, showing off his sculptural body.)

I swear it's true, that I took an oratory course to be able to give a line in a more truthful way. And nothing better than practicing this by initiating a married woman in the art of betrayal. It's ok that she's a few years older than me but I noticed the way she looked at my swim suit, which is why I insisted on standing all the time. This talk of multiple identity and the impossibility of dialogue in the contemporary world gives me an itch...

(Arranges his genitals from the outside of his swimsuit.)

I confess that I much prefer to deliver my lines in the form of a dialogue than these postmodern sketches that are an endless block of a masturbatory elegy on some topic and that leaves the audience astonished without knowing what is happening ending up fleeing the theater furious promising never to come back. Anyway. You can call me a Lukacsian, I don't care.

SCENE 8

HUSBAND

(Drying his hair off with a towel.)

Busy here today, isn't it? Who was that weird guy who walks from one end of the beach to the other thinking he's at a fashion show?

WIFE

(Pointing towards the sea.)

Isn't that a whale over there? We were promised that we would see whales when we bought this vacation package.

HUSBAND

Maybe it's a shark. Who were all these people here with you? Popsicle sellers?

WIFE

Since you don't like to come to the beach with me at dusk, today I'm going to come alone.

HUSBAND

The guy's protector is factor thirty, can you believe it?

WIFE

I can meet some shark by chance.

HUSBAND

I promised him I would lend him ours.

WIFE

(Turning to HUSBAND.)

Lend or apply?

HUSBAND

You could do that, don't you think? So you could act with the only character that you still haven't shared the scene with.

WIFE

And what if we are doubling?

(HUSBAND stares at WIFE not finding it funny.)

WIFE

If you started then finish it. The playwright doesn't want to get me out from under this umbrella. Haven't you realized it yet? The immobility? The comfort of security?

HUSBAND

So I'm going to get over with it.

(Picks up the sunscreen and walks toward SOLITARY who is offstage. He leaves.)

(Short pause.)

WIFE

Actually he *was* kind of selling a popsicle.

SCENE 9

(NERD passes by SOLITARY towards the sea.)

SOLITARY

Psst.

(NERD stops, turning to SOLITARY.)

SOLITARY

Didn't that woman you were talking to give you a sunscreen?

NERD

(Approaching SOLITARY.)

No, but taking the cue, that guy who was here before talking to you, are you friends?

SOLITARY (with a smile on his face.)

The handsome one?

(NERD looks down with embarrassment.)

SOLITARY

My childhood friend. Why?

(Short pause.)

NERD

Oh, you won't think that...

SOLITARY

That what?

NERD

That I...

SOLITARY

Sit down. I don't enjoy being alone. After all, the dissolution of the identity of the modern human being that turns us into several ones and makes interpersonal communication difficult is already enough.

NERD (interested.)

I think you didn't understand anything about this play. The problem lies in the role of the confidant who disappears from Drama as soon as people no longer trust each other but see themselves as potential enemies.

(Sitting down next to SOLITARY.)

SOLITARY

(Reaching the sunscreen to NERD with a smirk.)

Can you put some sunscreen on my back?

SCENE 10

WIFE

(Laughing to herself looking towards HUSBAND and SOLITARY who are offstage.)

You played the clown, sweetheart. The guy already got another one to put the sunscreen on him. The two seem to have gotten along well, and apparently they didn't even know each other. I have a steady partner, who I've known for years... who will come back here down, we'll be silent for hours, stand up, close the umbrella and go back to the hotel room. And between us there will no longer be dialogues or monologues, but silence. Instead of the confidant, I alone with myself. And speech will disappear and only the noise of the sea will remain. The whale song. Or the shark bite. And a cheap blackmail and a betrayal that may never have existed. A reheated and contemporary version of a minor play by Pirandello that I read a long time ago and whose name I've forgotten. I'm tired. It's hot. And the sea is calling me.

(Gets up and leaves towards the sea.)