

SWIMMING

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Dramatis Personæ

David Wright; early-40s
Denise Wright; late-20s
Alice Cole; mid-40s
Mark Robison; early-40s
Ruth Green; mid-40s

The play takes place in several locations in and around the town of Fletcher, Kansas.

The play is performed without intermission.

Author's note

I imagine a production taking place on a unit set that suggests, rather than realizes, the various locations in the story.

One

[August. Sunday evening. The end of a hot, humid day.

David and Denise's house. The eat-in kitchen. A door leads to the back yard; an open archway leads from the kitchen to the rest of the house. A window over the sink affords a view of the backyard.

Denise stands at the window, gazing intently into the yard. After a moment, She makes a sudden move to the kitchen table. She sits; picks up the Sunday paper; and begins working the crossword puzzle.

Almost immediately, David enters through the back door. He wears work clothes; is covered with sweat and grass clippings. He crosses to the sink, takes a glass from the drain. He looks out the window as he fills the glass with water; drinks.]

DENISE

[Reads clue.] One-oh-four across, "It 'passeth all understanding,' Philippians." Five letters. That's easy: "Peace." [Writes the answer.] One-oh-four down, "Overtake," starts with "P," four letters, "Pass." I don't know why I didn't get these earlier. [Filling in more answers.] This corner's no problem at all.

[David pours another glass of water.]

DENISE

[As SHE works the puzzle.] What's with all the water?

DAVID

What do you mean?

DENISE

You're drinking tons of water.

DAVID

No I'm not.

[He drinks.]

DENISE

Yes you are. [Another clue.] "Black piano key."

[David pours a third glass of water.]

DENISE

[Putting down the puzzle.] The garden looks nice. I bet you'll have twice as many tomatoes as last year.

[David turns around. He makes an elaborate show of pursing his lips; dipping them in the water.]

DENISE

[Laughing.] What are you doing?

DAVID

They're all chapped. From the sun. [Blowing bubbles in the water.] And the wind. [Bubbles between the words.] Ahh, the soothing coolness of water.

[David puckers his lips, begging for a kiss.]

DENISE

[Crossing to David.] You are so squirrely.

[They kiss.]

Denise stays in David's arms. She gazes into his eyes.]

DAVID

What are you doing?

DENISE

What do you mean?

DAVID

Staring at me.

DENISE

I love looking at you.

DAVID

[Turning away.] It makes me nervous.

DENISE

I can't admire my husband? [Pulling his back face back to hers.] You make me very happy, David Wright.

[David smiles.]

DENISE

You happy?

DAVID

Yes.

DENISE

Good.

[She gives him a playful slap on the ass; then turns to the table.]

DAVID

I'm not moody on purpose.

DENISE

[Working to keep the mood light.] Sweetie

DAVID

It's just. . . Everybody's going back to work. I'm a teacher, for Christ's sake. That's what I'm good at. I'm forty-four years old. If I'm not going to be a teacher--

DENISE

A little bump in the road. That's all this is. Not even a detour. Just a little bump. Something we slide over like we never even noticed.

[David nods his head.]

DAVID

[Putting on his game face.] How about I put away the mower and get cleaned up and then we start making dinner. You hungry?

[David crosses to the back door.]

DENISE

[As he reaches the door.] I did the test.

DAVID

[Pulling up short.] Really? When?

DENISE

Just a few minutes, I guess.

DAVID

We talked about this. We said if we thought we needed a test we'd both be there.

DENISE

I know.

DAVID

That's what we decided.

DENISE

It's just. . . The last couple of days it's like I'm getting my old Dave back. You're working in the yard. You're running, again. This morning, at breakfast, you smiled. You didn't think I saw, but you did. You smiled, right?

DAVID

Once.

DENISE

I got overly enthusiastic. You forgive me?

[David is silent.]

DENISE

You know what? I'll get a new one. I'll throw that one away and we can start completely over.

DAVID

Don't. That's just. . . It's stupid to waste. What'd it say?

DENISE

Oh, it's not ready. It's got. . . [Looking at a wall clock.] ten, fifteen minutes to go. You forgive me?

[David nods his head.]

Denise lets out a sigh of relief.]

DENISE

This is our life, say it with me, This is our life and it's going to be all right.

DAVID

[Joining in part way through.] . . . and it's going to be alright.

DENISE

It is, David. Our life is going to be all right.

[David goes to put away the mower.]

Denise sits at the kitchen table. She tries to concentrate on the puzzle but is unable to contain her thoughts.

David enters.]

DENISE

[Upbeat. Reading from the list of crossword clues.] "Who Rhada enjoys: Hindu myth."

DAVID

What?

DENISE

"Who Rhada enjoys." H, blank, M, S, blank, blank, F.

DAVID

I don't know.

DENISE

Hindu myth. H, blank, M, S, blank, blank, F. You're not trying.

DAVID

Yes, I am.

DENISE

Mr. "Comparative Literature." Mr. "I read Salamon [sic] Rushdie."

DAVID

Rushdie is Islam, not Hindu.

DENISE

Still. Smart as you are--

DAVID

Shouldn't we check--

DENISE

[Switching gears.] It's not time.

DAVID

I thought these tests were instantaneous.

DENISE

No, just. . . fast. And reliable.

[David gets a glass of water.

Denise works her puzzle.

Silence.]

DAVID

Denise.

DENISE

[Her head still in the puzzle.] David.

DAVID

Ten years we've been married. Up to now this is nothing we've even contemplated, much less allowed to become a possibility.

DENISE

David--

DAVID

Not that I'm old. It's not that. It's just. . . You're young and I'm not. Not entirely. The fact we've allowed ourselves to get even this far. . . "Yes" or "no" things have changed--

DENISE

Everything is going to be alright. Okay? Let's fool around.

DAVID

Can we?

DENISE

It'll make time go faster.

DAVID

I'm all sweaty.

DENISE

I like you when you're sweaty.

[David smiles; then lays himself across the table. He pulls himself face-to-face with Denise. They kiss.]

DAVID

This could be the last time we're totally alone. That stick has a plus sign--

DENISE

You want a plus sign?

[David nods his head "Yes." Denise smiles.]

DAVID

Even after the kid's moved out, got kids of his own, we'll never be just the two of us. This might be our last chance to be totally devoted just to each other. Tell me something about you I don't all ready know.

DENISE

You already know everything about me.

DAVID

Something from before we met.

DENISE

I was nineteen. Nothing happened before we met.

DAVID

That's not true.

DENISE

I grew up on a farm, thirty minutes from here. You know what that's like.

DAVID

No family scandals you've been keeping to yourself?

[Denise nods her head "No."]

DAVID

Bummer.

[They kiss.]

DENISE

We really ought to fool around.

[They kiss.]

DAVID

[Suddenly.] Himself. "Who Rada enjoys" is himself. [HE reaches for the puzzle.] Rada can split himself in two. His female side separates from his male side and so he "enjoys" himself.

DENISE

He could do that?

DAVID

It's a myth. [Filling in the blank.] H, I, M, S, E, L, F.

[David puts down the pencil. They catch each other's eye and fall into a long silence.]

DAVID

It's got to be time. We should check--

DENISE

You ever have that problem at Christmas about whether or not to ask for something you really wanted? 'Cause if you asked for it and Santa didn't bring it, then everyone would know you were disappointed and you'd have to live with people feeling sorry for you. But if you asked and got it, then you'd have to live with people knowing you actually got what it was you said would make you happy--

DAVID

Denise, I love you. If there's a baby I'll love the baby. If there's not--

DENISE

[Cutting him off.] I'm pregnant.

[David is silent.]

DENISE

I've been having this feeling. Like I told you. So I went to Dr. Phelps and . . . I'm having a baby.

DAVID

[Pointing off-stage, to the bathroom.] Then what's with test?

DENISE

There is no test.

[Silence.]

DAVID

How long have you known?

DENISE

Since Tuesday.

[David nods his head.]

DENISE

I wanted to know how I felt, just myself, before I told anyone else. That makes sense, right?

[David nods his head.]

DAVID

I've been crazy here--

DENISE

I know. I wanted to come up with something memorable. Something better than me just saying, "Guess what?" or "By the way I'm pregnant."

DAVID

You don't have to worry about me.

DENISE

I know.

DAVID

That's all behind me.

DENISE

I know that.

DAVID

Last week. . . That was supposed to be just me and the lawyers. No one else. That bitch of a reporter shows up--

DENISE

I told you I think you should sue.

DAVID

That stirs the pot. The sooner people forget about this the better.

[Silence.]

DENISE

We're going to have a baby.

DAVID

I'm going to be a father.

DENISE

You are. You are going to be a father.

DAVID

That's good. [A slow smile playing across his face.] I feel good.

DENISE

I feel good, too. Actually, I feel great. Amazingly, wonderfully, splendiferously, amazingly great.

DAVID

[Smiling. Reaching across the table to take her hand.] We're gonna have a baby.

DENISE

We are. We're gonna have a baby.