

JJ



a play in three scenes

by

H. G. Brown

CHARACTERS

JAMES JOSEPH (JJ): a man in his late thirties, employed below his capabilities and intellect, he is quiet, careful, and ambitious.

SIDNEY: a man in his sixties, who found his place in life long ago and is comfortable with that. He has been JJ's mentor.

CAROL: a woman in her early thirties, a professor of German Language at a liberal arts college, she is JJ's fiancée.

CANDACE: Carol's sister is a woman in her early twenties, flirtatious, sexy, but not a tease.

TONY: a man in his twenties is a would-be hit man on a mission of revenge.

PAULIE: a man in his twenties is a friend of Tony's - handsome, guileless Paulie!

CHUCK: a man in his thirties, and a part-time minor league crook.

SAL: a man in his thirties, is also a part-time crook and friend of Chuck's.

BENNY: a man in his late thirties is edgy and quick to take offense. His favorite weapon: a knife.

TIME

A week in early September 1960

SCENE ONE

A cottage on a lake in Wisconsin, day

SCENE TWO

A warehouse just outside Chicago, night

SCENE THREE

The cottage, day

SCENE ONE

A cottage on a lake in Wisconsin

At Rise: A wicker table and chairs, center, a wicker love seat, right, table with teapot and cups.

The entrance to the cottage is up right.

SID is seated at the table. JJ brings him a cup of tea.

SID

Tell you the truth, JJ, I don't remember the last time I had a cup of tea.

JJ

Maybe it was at your grandma's.

SID

I never had a grandma.

JJ

Everybody had a grandma.

SID

Yeah, yeah but I never knew her. I never knew my granny.

SID sips his tea. JJ turns back to the table and pours a cup for himself

SID

I think it needs something.

JJ

What?

SID

I don't know... something. What the fuck do I know about tea?

JJ

Hey!

SID

Sorry.

JJ

Carol could walk in anytime.

SID

I'll watch my language. You got my word.
(sipping his tea)
It needs something.

JJ

Milk? Honey?

SID

Yeah, sure... I'll try anything. This is not Lipton's -

JJ

(bringing milk and honey to the table)
No. No, it is... something else.

SID

It's not your usual tea. It's smoky. Not that I know
all there is to know about tea.
(adding milk and honey)
You got no coffee, huh?

JJ

Carol took us off coffee, here, at the cottage. Just Chinese tea
she got somewhere.

SID

Probably from China. From Chinatown.
(sipping his tea)
Not bad. Not my cup of tea, but not bad.

JJ

It calms the nerves.

SID

Right. Who am I to complain?

JJ

Tea makes her happy, and that's fine with me.

SID

Carol is a lovely woman.

JJ

I got lucky.

SID

Never forget the source of your good fortune.

JJ

I like your suit. That's a nice suit you're wearing.

SID

Thank you. It's a business suit. I am here on business.

JJ

That's not off the rack at Robert Hall.

SID

It certainly is not.

JJ

So, you drove here from Chicago, in your new business
Suit --

SID

It ain't new, JJ.

JJ

-- just to visit me, on vacation with my fiancée and her sister.

SID

You have a nice view of the lake.

JJ

I'm on vacation, Sid.

SID

You deserve one; you earned one. I don't argue that.

(sipping his tea, pause)

Wisconsin is full of little towns just like this, Lake Whatever.
So many lakes, so many little towns. You get away from the big
city - which would be Milwaukee, right? What else is there in
Wisconsin, except one little town after another, one more pretty
lake after another --

JJ

You had trouble finding me?

SID

I am not good with maps.

JJ

Well, maps aren't your business.

SID

Cash flow, balancing the books: that's my business.

JJ

And that's what brings you here: business?

SID

It can't be done over the phone. I know - we all know - you're on vacation. You earned it. But we got a situation, JJ. It's gotta be resolved.

JJ

It's that bad?

SID

Conflict resolution. We've tried but these punks - excuse me -

JJ

Go on.

SID

We decided. We gotta turn it over to you.

JJ

(sitting at the table)

Your tea is getting cold.

SID

I brought the file.

SID reaches for his briefcase and pulls out some papers that he hands to JJ.

JJ glances at the papers.

SID

See. You see why we're upset? You can read all about it.

JJ

Okay. They were out of line. They have a history.

SID

We just need you to resolve it, that's all. The situation cries out for your special touch.

JJ

Look, Sid, I'm only here for a couple weeks.

SID

Can't wait.

JJ

We just got here. What do I tell Carol?

SID

She's got her sister for company, right? A few days and you'll have everything back the way it oughta be.

JJ

I will need to call in some people.

SID

Do whatever you gotta do. Carte blanche.

JJ

(pushing the papers to SID)

It'll take a week at least to arrange things and set up the meeting.

SID

Maybe you could speed things up a little. They want this settled pronto.

JJ

Carol--

SID

Carol will understand. She's a smart lady: college professor speaks how many languages?

JJ

Sidney, never quit your job for sales. You would starve.

SID

Actually I tried that once.

JJ

Starving?

SID

Sales, vacuum cleaners, door to door: it's a tough life.

SID pushes the papers to JJ.

JJ

Indeed it is.

SID

Ten percent of the sales force makes ninety percent of the sales. Did you know that?

JJ

(looking at the papers again)

I read that somewhere.

SID

Its true. Not just vacuum cleaners, that goes for anything. Door-to-door, on the floor, that's the way it is.

JJ

That would explain the big turnover in personnel.

JJ pushes the papers to SID.

SID

Very few make a life of it. A friend took me under his wing. More like an uncle than a friend. This is not for you, he said, vacuum cleaners, door-to-door. Let me show you something else, something just for you.

(pushing the papers back to JJ)

That's what he did for me, that good friend.

JJ

Just like you did for me.

SID

I owed you for Eugene. The war and all... Well, you know --

JJ

Yeah, I know. Okay, I'll look over the papers tonight, call you tomorrow --

SID

This is an emergency. They want this settled.

JJ

When I get time I'll look them over.

SID

JJ, a vacation! It's not like you're retired.

JJ

It's been over a year - go here, go there - LA, Vegas, Miami --

SID

I know.

JJ

One thing after another.

SID

This is an election year. People get distracted; they don't take care of business.

JJ

Oh, that explains it. Why didn't I think of that? An election year.

SID

Don't forget to vote.

JJ

Don't worry, I plan to vote.

SID

You damn well better vote!

JJ

Vegas, Miami, Dallas - always hither and yon, never enough time.

SID

Your vote is important.

JJ

I wasn't talking about voting

SID

A Catholic president: this is a big thing.

JJ

Hatch the chicken first, okay?

SID

What's that suppose' to mean? I don't count my chickens?

JJ

Yes. No. You don't count your - whatever.

SID

You really need to get outa Wisconsin. Where do you get this stuff? Chickens, hither and yon... Listen, it's in the bag.

JJ

What, the election?

SID

What else?

JJ

It is not in the bag, Sid. Nothing is in the bag.

SID

Well, I'm sorry you feel that way, sport. Ain't you the least bit enthusiastic?

JJ

I don't know if the country's ready.

SID

Believe me, the country's ready. It's not like we are talking about a Jew President or a Schwartz, God forbid.

JJ

Someday.

SID

A Jew, maybe, but the other? Not in my lifetime.

(pause)

I got cancer, JJ.

JJ

(after pause)

Don't do this! Just to get me to drive back to Chicago? That's not even close to funny.

SID

I ain't kiddin. I got it. The Big Casino.

Pause

JJ

How bad is it?

SID

What the fuck, its cancer.

JJ

I'm sorry. Jeez! Like to cut my tongue out.

SID

Take it easy, kid.

JJ

I'm really sorry.

SID

Don't worry; I'll make it through the election. After that, hell, I'll just stay drunk and celebrate.

JJ

It's going to be close, Sid. Eisenhower is still the man on the white horse, and that helps Nixon. They've got new programs in the schools since Sputnik. Carol's nephew is in all kinds of special courses.

SID

Private schools, sure.

JJ

No, public. He goes to Proviso: accelerated classes. The interstate highways are getting built. People love that: coast to coast, New York to Florida -

SID

Eisenhower got that from the Krauts. Super highways, so they could move their troops fast. Lotta good it did them, huh? And what about this business with Cuba! People are steamed about that. I mean, people we know. Are you listening to me? They don't like it. Mark my words, Kennedy will be the first Catholic President of the USA, and I will live to see it.

JJ

I'm sure you will.

SID

I wish Eugene coulda lived to see it, too.

JJ

I know. So do I.

SID

Okay, so, whadda ya say? Ready to head back to Chicago? You can even drive the Lincoln part way.

JJ

Gee, thanks.

SID

Don't mention it. You got insurance, right?

JJ

I've got to explain things to Carol.

SID

Sure, sure, Carol will understand. Where is she?

JJ

With her sister. They took the canoe for a paddle across the lake.

SID

Is that what do you do for fun around here?

JJ

That's what we do.

SID

No TV? Radio? You play cards?

JJ

Cards, checkers, chess... We read. We talk about this and that. We have a record player.

SID

You got any Perry Como records?

JJ

Mostly chamber music. Some opera.

SID

Yeah, I like opera...

(he picks up a book from the table)

Four Quartets - you read this?

(he opens the book)

Poetry?

JJ

Yes

SID

Poetry. What's it all about?

JJ

I don't know.

SID

Whaddaya mean you don't know?

JJ

I mean, I don't know. It's hard to say.

SID

What's the story?

JJ

It's a poem, Sid; four, long poems.

SID

Yeah, but there's gotta be a story. *Stopping By The Woods On A Snowy Evening* is a poem - that's one I know, sort of. I read that one, and it's about stopping by the woods on a snowy evening. Eugene read it in high school; he read it to me, and I still remember the story. It's about this guy and the horse he rode in on, and the little horse wonders why the guy has stopped to look at the woods. What? Just to watch the woods fill up with snow? They aren't even his woods. And the guy, the man on the horse, admits they have a long way to go. "And miles to go before I sleep."

(pause)

There's your story.

(pause)

It's a poem, so you don't expect much, but there it is. Women love that stuff.

JJ

Yes, they do.