

Scene One

(It is seven thirty on a weekday fall evening in the living room of a typical suburban house in middle American. Walter is pacing the room. He looks out the window, then walks stage right to the table and picks up a note and reads it for the tenth time.)

WALTER Eat leftovers!

(Walter picks up the TV remote, clicks on the TV, puts the remote on the dinette table and exits to the kitchen. The evening news is heard as follows.)

FIRST ANNOUNCER Roadside bombs killed two Americans and forty-three Afghans today. In Kabul a suicide bomber walked into a crowded market and blew himself up killing eleven other Afghans. A spokesman for the government said that every effort was being made to—

(Walter enters with a slice of cold pizza on a plate during the announcement and immediately picks up the remote and changes the channel as he puts his plate down on the table.)

SECOND ANNOUNCER - Police officer Rupert Gonzales died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head last night. Only recently returned from Iraq, he leaves behind his wife and two—

(Walter desperately uses the remote to shut off the TV, slams the remote down on the table then suddenly kicks over a chair as he yells loudly.)

WALTER Damn damn damn!!!

(Walter silently drops down on his hands and knees over the chair with his head down and sobs. After a moment the phone rings and his answering announcement is heard.)

WALTER'S VOICE ON THE ANSWERING MACHINE - We're not home but if you leave a message we'll get back to you.

(As Walter hears Jessie's voice he gradually stops sobbing and stares into space.)

JESSIE'S VOICE Hi Mom, I've got my exam tonight and I'm going out with friends after so I can't call. I've got two more exams next week so I won't be coming by on Sunday. Tell Dad I need his help with my car. It's making funny noises again.

(After a moment the front door opens and Peg enters speaking as she does.)

PEG Walter I know I should have—. Walter?

(She sees him on the floor, walks to the dinette table and sits with her coat on.)

PEG I'm back.

(Walter continues to stare.)

I'm back!!

WALTER *(Walter looks up.)* Peg! It's seven thirty. Where have you been?

PEG Out.

WALTER *(Walter picks up the chair.)* I know that, but where?

PEG Just out. What happened?

WALTER You never just go out.

PEG What happened Walter?

WALTER I tripped, knocked the chair over, it's no big deal.

PEG That's the third time this week.

WALTER You always come straight home from school and make supper.

PEG You've got to stop thinking about—

WALTER Your note said eat leftovers you never wrote anything like that before.

(Peg ignores him and walks to the front door and opens it.)

You can't go out again.

PEG *(Peg stops suddenly and turns to face him.)* I can't? Did you say I can't?

(Peg exits closing the door behind her. Walter looks out the window to see what she is doing.)

WALTER What the hell is she up to?

(Walter hurries back to the sofa and tries to eat his pizza as though nothing has happened looking at the TV even though it is not on. Peg enters carrying an armful of books and travel pamphlets to the dinette table, dumps them noisily, and sits again staring into space. There is a moment of silence.)

PEG After school I sat in my car watching the kids and their moms holding hands—kids giggling—skipping—and then they were gone.

WALTER You hungry?

PEG Then I drove home.

WALTER Maybe we can get a pie. This piece has got to be a week—

PEG When I got to the corner of our street I—couldn't face it—I kept going—driving around for an hour—changing highways.

WALTER Cold left over pizza doesn't do it for me.

PEG Finally I just got off the nearest exit ramp to the street. I was only six blocks from the house—six blocks. You try to change things Walter but you still end up in the same place. *(There is silence as Peg gets up and looks out the window.)* Thirty years in the same house.

WALTER Thirty-one. Why don't you take your coat off?

(He gets up and walks to her, assisting as she slowly takes off her coat. He walks to closet and hangs up the coat as Peg speaks still looking out the window.)

PEG Joe and Mary Cooper's house looks just like ours.

WALTER So do the rest of the houses on the block.

PEG Do you know why?

WALTER No, but I'm sure you're going to tell me.

PEG Because all the people use them are the same. Everything matches, the lamps, the beds, the drapes, the towels, even us, we're just like the towels.

WALTER Are we going to get a pizza or not?

PEG The Coopers drive the same green dodge caravan as ours and even go to the same dentist.

(Walter goes to the dinette table and looks at the books and pamphlets.)

WALTER Well that's where you got to know Mary.

PEG My annual cleaning is every October; it's always in October. Why can't it be June or February?

WALTER Then it wouldn't be annual. *(He reads the title of a book.)*
The Emotional Impact Of Language.

(Peg becomes poetic as she speaks about writing.)

PEG When I look at this street all I see is gray, gray houses, gray
people, gray lives.

WALTER *(He reads and other title.)* How To Write The Great American
Novel.

PEG *(Spoken very poetically and dramatically)* Gray is the color of
their souls.

WALTER I'll bet you're involved with another one of those twelve step
programs.

PEG *(Again poetically)* I want to see beyond the façade.

WALTER Well you better put your glasses on.

PEG *(Back to normal speech)* Gray! You are the grayest man in
the universe.

WALTER I'll bet you lost them again.

PEG They're probably on the table. *(She walks to the dinette table
as Walter looks for the glasses.)*

WALTER They're not here. Did you look in the refrigerator?

PEG I didn't put them in there.

WALTER That's where you found them last time.

PEG I put them on top of that plastic container with the
cheesecake and I—

PEG AND WALTER Put the container in the fridge.

PEG Just help me find them.

WALTER What are all these travel pamphlets for?

PEG I know I had them when I got out of the car.

WALTER Check your coat pockets. Disneyland? I am not going to
Disneyland next summer.

(Peg goes to the closet takes her glasses out of her coat pocket and puts them on.)

PEG Don't jump to conclusions.

WALTER Then why all the pamphlets?

PEG It's just reading material.

WALTER How to write the great American novel isn't enough?

PEG *(Peg yells at Walter.)* No. It's not enough!

WALTER No need to get excited.

PEG I need something more than this.

WALTER This?

PEG This house this street—

WALTER There is nothing wrong with this house.

PEG This life!

WALTER *(Pause)* Jessie called. She left a message on the machine.

PEG You always do that.

WALTER Do what?

PEG Change the subject when I talk about us.

WALTER It's typical Jessie. I'll play it back if I can figure out which of these damn buttons to press.

PEG It's the one on the—

WALTER I found it.

WALTER'S VOICE ON THE ANSWERING MACHINE - We're not home but if you leave a message we'll get back to you.

PEG You're not supposed to say we're not home.

WALTER Just listen to the message.

JESSIE'S VOICE Hi Mom, I've got my exam tonight and I'm going out with friends after so I can't call. I've got two more exams next week so I won't be coming by on Sunday. Tell Dad I need his help with my car. It's making funny noises again.

WALTER Hi Mom, tell Dad. She can't ask me herself?

PEG It's a mother daughter thing. If we had a son you'd be getting the calls. She knows you'll hear the message.

WALTER Now that she's move out it's hard to talk to her.

PEG She's not your little girl anymore. She's a grown woman. All you need to do is ask her if she likes her classes.

WALTER You want me to take you shopping later?

PEG Don't change the subject again.

WALTER I thought you might need milk or something.

PEG We bought a gallon yesterday.

WALTER Ok, ok.

PEG If you want to communicate with Jessie or me you need to share.

WALTER Well I still need to gas up the car.

PEG Talk about what you feel.

WALTER I'm down to a quarter tank.

PEG Go ahead then. You're not listening to me anyway.

WALTER Of course I am. You said talk to her about school.

PEG Words, that's all you hear.

WALTER Like I said, I'm going to gas up the car.

PEG I think you'd live in that car if you could. All you do is drive.

WALTER It relaxes me.

PEG Then you'd better go.

WALTER I'll pick up some bread at the bakery while I'm at it.

(Walter picks up another book, Peg takes the book from him.)

PEG Just go.

PEG Everything you do lately is about Joey.

WALTER Don't go there Peg.

PEG Every time you watch the news you—

WALTER I've told you again and again, I'm over it and there's nothing psychological about my back.

PEG Well maybe you just don't want to admit you're getting older.

WALTER This has nothing to do with aging.

PEG Of course it does. Everything does. We're winding down.

WALTER I'm not a goddamn clock!

PEG Sure you are.

WALTER A clock doesn't feel things, I do.

PEG You're still slowing down.

WALTER Prove it.

PEG Get in the bed.

WALTER That's it Peg. I've had enough.

PEG I haven't.

WALTER You never talked like that when we were younger.

PEG I didn't have to.

WALTER There's no need to bring up the past.

PEG Lie down on the sofa.

WALTER I'm not in the mood to—

PEG I'm just going to massage your back. Isn't that what you want?

(Walter lies face down on the sofa and Peg starts to massage his back.)

You don't have to go through all this acting just to get a back rub.

WALTER I'm not acting.

PEG Just tell me you want one.

WALTER You know I've had problems ever since I fell off that ladder fixing that damn ceiling fan in the bathroom.

PEG It wasn't the fan.

WALTER I don't want to hear anymore about Joey.

(Peg purposely massages him too hard.)

Oh! Not so hard.

PEG All right, I'll be gentle.

WALTER That's better, much better.

PEG This brings back some memories.

WALTER More to the left.

PEG You and me, right here on this sofa on Jessie's fifth birthday.

WALTER That's enough Peg!

PEG After everyone went home and the Jessie went to sleep we took our time.

WALTER I said that's enough.

PEG You played with me, teased—

(Walter picks up Peg's glasses from the cushion.)

WALTER You put your glasses on the cushion. You're going to lose them again.

PEG I don't need them right now Walter.

WALTER *(Walter sits up.)* You could say thank you.

PEG Thank you.

WALTER You never would have found them in there, at least not until you went and bought a new pair.

PEG *(Peg gets up.)* You don't have an ounce of romance left in your entire body.

WALTER Romance? I thought this was a back rub.

PEG Just give me my glasses.

(He hands her the glasses and she puts them on.)

God! Now that I can see you clearly, that's all you're going to get.

WALTER That's all I wanted.

PEG At least diminishing vision gives the illusion of a softer gentler Walter

WALTER Very funny.

PEG Better looking too, just like on Jessie's fifth birthday.

WALTER You think I don't remember? It was the first time you showed real passion.

PEG Where's the passion now?

WALTER We're not kids anymore.

PEG You act as though life is already over.

WALTER Like an old run down clock? Well what does that make you?

PEG We're not talking about me.

WALTER You realize how often you complain about you're hands cramping with arthritis and you can't see a damn thing without your glasses.

PEG Look at us. Jessie's grown, the house is paid for and we just—I don't know, we just—wait.

WALTER Wait?

PEG For something to happen, but nothing ever does.

WALTER Sure it does.

PEG You gas up the car and pick up some bread.

WALTER Both things are necessary.

PEG So is passion.