

the beginning of

AFTERNOON SUN

a short play by Rich Orloff (from **COUPLES**)

The time is that period, in the mid-twentieth century, when air-conditioning only existed in movie theaters, when cities were far apart, when men wore hats, when women never wore pants, and when everyone in America agreed how people should act, even if they didn't always act that way in private.

It is afternoon on a hot, sunny day.

The place is a motel room on a road outside of town. This is the kind of motel for people who don't expect much in their room. There's a bed, a dresser, and a single painting one would never look at unless stuck in a motel room.

There is a window on the side wall. Although the blind is pulled down, one can almost feel the hot sun trying to force its rays into the room. There is also a door to the outside (which should not be on the same wall as the window).

The people are the man and the woman on the bed. The WOMAN, who has reached that age when young adulthood is becoming a memory, lies sideways on the bed, facing the wall. She wears a sundress which has been pushed up to her waist. Her panties and shoes are on the floor by the corner of the bed.

The MAN, who is the same age, sits on the edge of the bed, leaning forward, his hands resting on the insides of his legs. He wears a white shirt whose cuffs have been unbuttoned, plus a thin cotton undershirt, nicely pressed trousers, and socks. The man dresses to fit in, a goal he has admirably accomplished. His jacket and tie lay on the dresser nearby, and he has removed his shoes.

On the bed is an opened book. It is a Bible.

MAN

I'm sorry.

WOMAN

There's no need.

MAN

I – I just can't.

WOMAN

It happens.

MAN

It's not that I don't want to.

WOMAN

I know.

MAN

I didn't mean to, I – I've toyed with you.

WOMAN

Not as much as I hoped you would.

MAN

It's not that I don't want to.

WOMAN

I know.

MAN

I didn't mean to, I – I've toyed with you.

WOMAN

Not as much as I hoped you would.

MAN

I led you on.

WOMAN

Everybody does that.

MAN

That doesn't make it right.

WOMAN

At least it got me out of the office for the afternoon.

MAN

You probably think I'm a fool, don't you?

WOMAN

No more than most men.

MAN

Well.

The man picks up the Bible.

WOMAN

I told you not to open that drawer.

MAN

I had to find a place for my –

WOMAN

You could've just put the damn thing
in your pocket.

MAN

I didn't know this would be in there.

WOMAN

You don't know motel rooms very well, do you?

MAN

No.

WOMAN

Kiss me.

MAN

I...

WOMAN

Put the book down and kiss me.

MAN

I don't think that's a –

WOMAN

You won't fry in hell for kissing me.

MAN

How do you know?

WOMAN

I've been in hell many times but
never because I kissed someone.

MAN

(tempted, but...)

I, uh, I think we should go.

WOMAN

I'm not ready.

MAN

Look, nothing's going to –

WOMAN

It's too hot out. The sun'll melt me.

MAN

(starting to get dressed)

I think we should get dressed and go.

WOMAN

You can go if you want. I'm staying.

MAN

I can't just leave you here.

WOMAN

I bet you can.

MAN

Who do you think I am?

WOMAN

A man.

MAN

You must've known some pretty awful men.

WOMAN

You know, I don't mind if you think I'm trash, but don't pity me.

MAN

I don't think you're trash.

WOMAN

And what do you think of me?

MAN

Well... I think you're pretty.

WOMAN

Is that all?

MAN

No, of course not... You have very nice hair.

WOMAN

Men.

MAN

What'd I –

WOMAN

My Auntie Ro once told me, beauty's only skin deep – and that's enough for most men.

MAN

I think you're a very nice person.

WOMAN

I think you're afraid to think otherwise.

MAN

It's, I think it's time to go.

WOMAN

You can if you'd like.

MAN

What will you do here by yourself?

WOMAN

Read the Bible. Look for signs the Lord's not a sadist.

MAN

You don't really think the Lord's –

WOMAN

What type of deity would create something that feels so good that only the fear of eternal damnation would keep us from doing it all the time.

MAN

In Luke, it says –

WOMAN

You believe in this stuff, don't you?

MAN

I try to.

WOMAN

You're too good for your own good.

MAN

I'm not a saint, you know.

WOMAN

Oh?

MAN

I look at women.

WOMAN

The sin of looking, how horrible.

MAN

I once went to a girlie show in Chicago.

WOMAN

Ooo, the sin of *paying* to look.

MAN

I almost suggested something
to a woman on a train once.

WOMAN

What stopped you?

MAN

She got off the train.

WOMAN

Well, I'm in no hurry to get off.

MAN

We, we should go.

WOMAN

You can go if you want.

MAN

How will you get back to town?

WOMAN

I'll find a way.

MAN

(reaching for his wallet:)

Here, you can, you can call a –

WOMAN

Don't.

MAN

I didn't mean to im–

WOMAN

Stay.

She kisses his neck.

MAN

I, uh...

The man checks his watch. The woman slowly puts her arms around the man.

WOMAN

The sun's making it so hot out there. It's as if the Lord's suggesting we stay inside.

The man extricates himself from the woman's arms.

MAN

I'm sorry.

WOMAN

There you go being sorry again. One would think you'd gotten a degree in it.

MAN

Well, it's just, I –

WOMAN

Would you have felt sorrier if you had surrendered to your desires?

MAN

I'd like to think so.

WOMAN

What a world in which thoughts as those give us comfort.

MAN

We really should – I'm expected –

WOMAN

Not yet.

MAN

I really –

WOMAN

Please.

MAN

Look –

WOMAN

I won't even touch you.

MAN

Then what would we do?

WOMAN

You can share with me your wisdom.

MAN

Well, that wouldn't be worth sticking around for.

WOMAN

Don't sell yourself short. I bet you can answer a question I've *never* been able to figure out.

MAN

And what's that?

WOMAN

How did you cure yourself... of yearning?

MAN

Pardon me?

WOMAN

How did you cure yourself of yearning?