

GOING NUCLEAR

A (short) play in one act

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Cast of Characters

Bob Smith

40-year-old husband

Jane Smith

38-year-old wife

Chuck Cooper

40-year-old husband

Clarice Cooper

38-year-old wife

Place

A middle class
neighborhood street

Time

Present

ACT I

Scene 1

Setting: A middle class suburban street. UP CENTER, two doors separate dwellings next to each other. It's night time.

At Rise: In the darkness, a loud kerfuffle escalates between two men who bawl at each other with cussing and threatening statements. A few seconds into the shouting match, the commotion is muffled by the thunderous sound of an atomic bomb explosion. As silence ensues, the lights fade in on the stage showing Bob, Chuck, Jane, and Clarice standing on the street.

CLARICE (*Steps in between the two quarreling men*) Please stop it before this gets out of hand.

BOB You get your hand out of this.

CHUCK (*Steps toward Bob*) Don't you dare to talk to my wife like that.

CLARICE (*Stretches her arms out to keep the men away*) Please, you are stepping into some very dangerous territory. You must never forget your agreement. Never!

JANE (*Steps next to Clarice*) Let them decide how they want to resolve their issues. The Scripture says that's no woman's business to tell men what to do.

CLARICE (*Ignores her comment with a disdainful look and then readdresses the men*) There's got to be a way to resolve our differences amicably. After all, we are neighbors.

JANE We are not neighbors. We just happen to live next door to each other. In any other way we're as far apart as the Earth and the moon.

CLARICE (*Stares Jane down*) Doesn't your scripture also say something about loving thy neighbor as thyself?

JANE As I said, we are not neighbors.

CLARICE For god sake woman, let some common sense squeeze through the chinks of your narrow mind.

JANE You libs think that we Christians are small-minded, but I'll tell you that the only thing narrow here is your gateway to heaven.

CLARICE (*Ignores her comment*) If this conflict turns into an all out war, we'll never see the end of it.

JANE Let the principles of the Holy Bible prevail.

CLARICE (*Frowns*) What are you talking about?

JANE The Book of Exodus 21:24 states very clearly that's "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But of course, you are a crass pagan woman and you don't know anything about the Bible.

CLARICE "Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates friends."

JANE (*Gasps*) Proverbs 17:9! How did you learn that?

CLAICE I may be a crass pagan, but a very well read one.

JANE In any case, this doesn't apply to us. We're not even neighbors much less friends.

BOB (*Interjects*) Enough of this pussy talk already!

CLARICE All I'm asking is that we restore some common sense before this train derails off the tracks.

BOB Derail off the tracks? This train's hit the guardrails and gone down the cliff a long time ago.

CLARICE No, it hasn't; at least not yet, and it won't if we step on the breaks before it's too late.

BOB (*Stares at her with a sardonic expression*) You think you're real smart, don't you?

CLARICE If only I could say the same about you.

BOB What a smartass you are.

CHUCK (*Moves threateningly toward Bob*) Don't you ever talk to my wife like that again or...

BOB (*Interjects*) Or what?

CHUCK I'll kill you!

CLARICE (*Latches on to Chuck and pulls him away*) Please Chuck, I beg you.

CHUCK I hate this bastard!

CLARICE Please, I implore you to put an end to this confrontation before it puts an end to us. A fistfight will not solve our differences or lead to anything good.

BOB Damn right it won't! I'll beat the crap out of your husband in front of you; and I'll make it so loud that your children will hear inside the house.

CHUCK (*Disentangles from Clarice's grip and moves toward Bob*) You son of a bitch!

CLARICE (*Holds him back*) Please Chuck, don't do anything stupid. It's not worth it.

JANE (*Addressing Bob*) She's afraid you'll put the lights out of her man.

CHUCK (*Shoves Clarice aside and rolls his sleeves before taking on a fighting stance*)

BOB Whoa, whoa, hold your horses right there man. What's bulging out on your waistline? What you hiding there?

CHUCK I'm hiding nothing.

BOB Nah, nah, nah; you got something in there man. I'm no pretty girl, so I don't think you just happy to see me. C'mon, what you got there?

CHUCK (*Looks aside*) I'm not hiding anything.

BOB Yes, you are, you dirty rat. You packing heat.

CHUCK (*Defensively*) Our agreement is to never use our guns if we fight, but we never agreed on not carrying it. And since I always carry my piece wherever I go, I'm not hiding anything.

BOB Well, if you wanna settle our row with a fistfight, you gonna have to put your piece down on the curb; (*points to the spot*) right there.

CHUCK (*Looks at him suspiciously*) What about yours?

BOB (*Flustered*) What you talking about?

CHUCK Lift your shirt and turn around.

BOB (*Sneers at Chuck without saying a word, then removes his revolver from behind his back and puts it on the curb*) There! Now you put your gun right next to mine and we'll let the punches flow.

CHUCK (*Takes his pistol off and places it on the curb next to Bob's*)

CLARICE Good. Now that the guns are down, this is our chance to work it out in a levelheaded manner.

JANE Really? And what exactly you suggest us to do?

CLARICE That we walk away without fighting and get rid of the guns for good.

JANE What a pipedream.

CLARICE If either party uses a firearm...

JANE (*Interjects*) We know eventually someone will.

CLARICE Nuclear power nations have been able to not use their powerful bombs, yet; well it happened twice, but that was before the agreements.

JANE Well, we're not nations anymore than we are neighbors or friends.

CLARICE Then let's work out our grievances and find a way to resolve our problems peacefully.

BOB You are our problem! And I'm sick and tired of dealing with the same bother every day.

CLARICE What's it about us that bothers you so much?

BOB It? Are you kidding me? Damn! There are so many issues about you I don't even know where to start.

JANE Why don't you start with the noise they make late at night that keeps us awake when we want to fall asleep.

CHUCK And do you want me to stop making love with my wife because the sound of pleasure irks you?

BOB Sound! Hell no! It's a freaking thunderstorm during an earthquake!

JANE Yeah, loud screaming, moaning (*mimics moaning sounds*), and banging on the paper-thin wall; all of it drive us bonkers.

CHUCK I'm sorry I don't get to hear any noise coming from your place late at night.

BOB (*Frowning*) What you talking about? Are you breaking my chops? How can no sound coming from my place be a problem to you?

CHUCK Well, maybe you can't get it up anymore and that pisses you off that my wife and I have a healthy sex life and you don't.

JANE (*Intervenes*) This is totally uncalled for. Bob had prostate cancer and we...

BOB (*Interjects*) What I have or don't have is none of this jackass business. The problem is on his side of the wall not ours.

CLARICE I promise you that we'll make an effort to subdue the expression of our passion. Love making should not be a reason to fight with your neighbors about.

JANE I already told you we're not neighbors. We just happen to live next to each other.

CLARICE Whatever.

CHUCK What else you got on your grievance list?

BOB Oh geez, how much time do we have? Let's see: your son bullies my boy at school; your dog barks all the time; your blasting music...

CLARICE (*Interjects*) Alright, let's drop the petty complaints and cut to the chase. Tell me what bothers you the most about Chuck and we start working out the issues from the top down. It's time to start a negotiation.

BOB (*Glowers at Chuck*) You; that's what bothers me the most. I don't like you and it'll give me great pleasure to whip your ass with my bare hands.

CHUCK (*Glares back sneering at him*) You're as much of an idiot as your wimpy boy that my son beats up just for the fun of it.

BOB It's time to find out how much fun your son's father can have taking a beating of his own.

(*They charge at each other as Clarice gets in the middle*)

CLARICE Stop it! You cannot fight! You have a non-use-of-weapons agreement?

JANE They've put their guns down.

CLARICE Yes, but that doesn't mean they...

JANE (*Interjects*) Let men do what men do. They like beating the crap out of each other.

CLARICE (*Exasperated*) You don't seem to understand.

BOB Our pact is to never use the gun on the other, but we never agreed not to fight.

JANE And let's face it, we've always known that sooner or later the men would battle it out.

CHUCK (*Glowering at Bob*) Well, the day has come.

CLARICE Please don't start a personal war!

BOB Too late for that.

CLARICE You're all missing the point of the non-use-of-
weapons agreement.

JANE What're you talking about?

CLARICE The purpose of the treaty is to deter fighting
in the first place.

JANE Well, seems like that ship has sailed.

CLARICE As you said, men will do what men do, and
fighting is what they do best.

JANE Then let them do it.

CLARICE But a deadly shooting could still happen.

JANE Not with their weapons on the ground.

CLARICE (*Points to the weapons*) Look at that. They are
right there in plain view and within reach. The temptation
for the losing party to reach out for it is too dangerous
of a risk to take.

JANE I say let them beat the crap out of each other and
put an end to it once and for all.

BOB I need no guns to hammer this dude. I can do just
fine with my big hands.

CHUCK Your mouth is much bigger than your hands.

CLARICE And the guns are much bigger than both.

JANE That's a moot point. They've put their guns down.

CLARICE Yes, but it's within reach. Besides, the war
will go on long after the fistfight battle is over.

JANE Then they'll fight again.

BOB Enough talking already. Let's get on with this.

CHUCK Let's do it. My fists are itching to punch this clown in his big mouth.

CLARICE If you fight the non-use-of-weapons agreement will be for naught. We'll all be doomed if the losing party takes revenge.

JANE Doomed? Oh please, aren't you being a little dramatic?

CLARICE No, I'm being realistic. There is a reason nuclear power nations established arms control treaties. They know that if they use their mass destruction weapons on their enemies they'll all be finished.

BOB We're already finished. We just need to clean it up.

CHUCK You are the one who's finished. I'll be the one doing the clean up.

CLARICE You see, the fray will go on and on until someone snaps and reaches for the weapons and then...

CHUCK (*Interjects*) I'll be done with this bastard in no time.

CLARICE (*Sighs*) Damn! You just don't seem to get it. This is why nuclear power nations have arms control treaties in place. They know how important it is to halt their enemies from using weapons of mass destruction.

JANE You're being a real drama queen.

CLARICE No, I'm just being real. The nuclear war preventive strategy is called Détente.

JANE It's called what?

CLARICE Détente. It is a term coined in the late 1960s.

JANE What a weird word. What the hell does it mean?

CLARICE It's a French word that refers to military buildup to avoid a potential nuclear arms conflict. It's a fear-based effort to discourage humans from going MAD; the infamous acronym for "Mutually Assured Destruction."

JANE If there's anyone going mad here that's you. For starters, we're individuals not nations; and all we have is our God-given right to own guns. Nobody here has nuclear weapons.

CLARICE A gun in the hands of a man is just as lethal to the individual as a nuclear weapon is to a nation.

JANE You're crazy if you think they'd pull the trigger on the other; or that a nation would detonate a nuclear weapon on its enemy for that matter.

CLARICE It has been done twice before.

JANE That doesn't mean it'll happen again.

CLARICE The only way to remain sure of it is if we get rid of the weapons and restrain from confrontation by all means. When men fight, they lose any minute common sense they may have.

BOB You're getting carried away, woman. If the non-nuclear weapons treaties work for nations, our no-guns-use deal should hold ground, too. We'll trade blows not bullets.

CHUCK (*Extricates himself from Clarice and launches at Bob with abandon*) I had enough of this son of a bitch. I'm going to shove his small hands into his big mouth.

(*A fistfight ensues. After some scrambling, Chuck lands a hard punch on Bob who falls down on his back. He straddles Bob and pounds on him while yelling insults*)

CHUCK You miserable bastard! You're a stupid lump of shit! This is for all the years you've been nagging me for petty reasons! Now I'm going to beat you to a pulp to shut your big mouth up for good!

(*Chuck continues walloping Bob*)

JANE For God sake, stop fighting! For our children's sake, stop it now!

(*Chuck stops and a silence ensues. Bob lies immobile on the ground*)

CHUCK Goddamn it! I got carried away with my anger.

JANE (*Screams*) You killed my husband, you murderer!

(Voices of children crying out "daddy, daddy," from inside the dwelling)

CLARICE (*Walks toward Chuck and moves him away from straddling Bob on the ground*) I knew it was a big mistake. The battle you won will become the war we'll all lose.

CHUCK No, now it's over. We're done.

CLARICE No honey, you may be done, but he is not. He'll pursue revenge for the humiliation he suffered.

CHUCK (*Pauses*) We honored our no-guns-use pact and fought a fair and clean fight. It's over now.

(Without saying another word, Clarice sits down on the curb and buries her head under her crossed arms over her knees)

JANE (*Kneels next to Bob caressing his face*) Talk to me Bob, please say something to me.

BOB (*Moans while slowly moving his head*) I'm...O.K. babe, I'm O.K. I'm badly hurt but I'm still alive.

JANE (*Mumbles to herself*) Good. The most dangerous man is a wounded one.

(Children crying and screaming coming from inside both dwellings)

CHUCK I need to go tell the kids everything is alright. (*Exits through his place's door*)

JANE (*Exits the stage rushing into her home*) Mommy is coming; mommy is coming.

(Clarice remains sitting on the curb with her head covered under her crossed arms as Bob reaches out to the guns, picks his up, and then points it at Clarice)

BOB Imagine that, you were right all along.

CLARICE (*Lifts her head and stares at him impassively*)
No one who can see tragedy coming and is unable to prevent it from happening can ever be right.

BOB Oh no, no..., you were definitely right. You are looking straight into the barrel proof of it.

CLARICE It doesn't take genius to know that no man would ever tolerate being humiliated in front of his family and not retaliate with a vengeance.

BOB Damn right!

CLARICE Neither would a mother in front of her children or a nation before her citizens.

BOB You were clever to foresee that the non-guns-use treaty was like an old cracked bucket that didn't have a chance in hell to hold any water.

CLARICE You don't have to be clever. You just need not to be blind.

BOB Well, right now I am blind with anger and lust for revenge.

CLARICE And so will be Chuck if you pull the trigger on me.

BOB I'll put an end to that bastard, too.

CLARICE And the cycle of revenge and hatred will continue on... until there's no one left to tell the story.

BOB Yeah, and you're leading the way.

CLARICE No, I'm ending the way.

BOB Have a good trip to the unknown. (*He pulls the trigger*)

(*Upon hearing the shot, Chuck dashes out of his house with a rifle in hand. He sees Clarice bleeding on the street and goes berserk*)

CHUCK You filthy pig! *(He fires the rifle at Bob)* You broke our agreement you son of a bitch! *(He fires at him again)* Your word is worth shit! *(He fires at him again)*

(Chucks releases a primal animalistic howling before barging into Bob's house. Shortly thereafter, several gun shots are heard before he walks out and sits down next to Clarice who's still barely alive)

CLARICE Oh Chuck, what a tragedy fell upon us! At least you and the kids will survive this senseless folly.

CHUCK You're going to make it, too, my love. Just hang in there with me and we'll be...

(Before Chuck can finish his sentence, Jane appears at her doorstep all bloodied up holding a machine gun spraying Clarice and Chuck to death. Then, she stumbles into their home and another spraying of bullets is heard. A brief pause ensues)

JANE *(Cries out from inside the Cooper's home)* An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Let the Lord be my judge and may he have mercy on my soul.

(A final shot is heard as the lights fade out)

Final Curtain

