

N I C K A M A T U Z I O



**THE
AMERICAN WAY**

The American Way

(A One Act Play)

by Nick Amatuzio

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(SATIRE/DRAMA. Estimated running time: 32 minutes)

Synopsis: Ada has cooked breakfast for her husband, BERG, who is
planning a big surprise.

The American Way

SETTING:

A modern family kitchen somewhere in a large town or city in USA.

TIME:

THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE.

PLEASE NOTE: handguns are fictitious & obviously not real.

Characters

ADA - Berg's wife, 35, cheerful, eager to please.

BERG - Ada's husband, 41, methodical, a hotel clerk.

MELISSA - Sweet 14 year old daughter.

WELDON - Moody 15 year old son.

Scene 1:

Early morning. Labor Day.

Scene 2:

Almost noon that same day,

Scene 3:

The next day. Early morning. First day of school.

The American Way

"Mama said the pistol is the devil's right hand."

Steve Earl - The Devil's Right Hand

"We got twenty-five rifles just to keep the population down."

Neil Young - Revolution Blues

The American Way

Scene 1:

LIGHTS up on a modern kitchen with a table, four padded chairs, a stove and fridge.

A framed picture of Jesus, looking healthy and wise, smiles down from high on a wall. A corner bookstand holds a Cathedral or Gothic style radio with CD, a small American flag and an open bible.

A fresh pot of coffee's on the stove. A folded newspaper, a cup of milk, a cup of sugar, a jar of blueberry jam and sliced bread are on the table.

The hallway, living room and stairs lead to the second floor OSR. The CD softly plays 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home.'

CD PLAYER

When Johnny comes marching home again, hurrah, hurrah! We'll give him a hearty welcome then, hurrah, hurrah ...

ADA, 35, plump, hair in rollers, in a flowery dress covered by a bright apron, is wiping the table clean when BERG, 41, dressed in business attire, ENTERS S.R.

ADA

Good morning, sweetie. Sleep well?

ADA turns off the CD.

BERG

(yawns)

If you didn't wake me I'd still be sleeping.

ADA

You didn't hear the alarm?

BERG

Guess not. I'll just have a coffee.

ADA

You've been working too hard. You come home late every night. That's why you're so tired. I made you two eggs, sunny side up, just the way you like them.

She turns. They kiss. Separate.

BERG

I'm not hungry. Truth is, I'm too tired to eat. Let's see what's going on in America today.

ADA takes four slices of toasted bread from the toaster. BERG sits. Unfolds the paper, scans headlines, lowers the paper.

ADA

Sweetie, if you don't eat, you'll get sick. If anything happens to you...You have the eggs. I'll have a toast. Deal?

BERG

All right. You win. I'll have the toast.

ADA stares back, waves the spatula in a threatening manner, then puts it down.

ADA

Ha, ha. Tomorrow, you will have a proper breakfast or you won't leave this house. I mean it.

BERG

I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die.

ADA fills two cups of coffee, hands BERG a cup. Sits. He adds milk.

ADA

I wish you'd stop saying that.

BERG

It's only an expression, hon.

ADA

I don't like it. I've told you time and time again. It's bad luck.

BERG

Okay.Okay. From this day on, I will stop saying, 'I hope to die.'

BERG pours on the sugar. ADA stares.

ADA

Sweetie ... Easy on the sugar, dear.

BERG

Huh. Oh right. You know me and my sweet teeth.

BERG scowls as he picks up the jar of jam.

BERG

Hon, not strawberry jam.

ADA

They were out of orange, love. It's good. Has no artificial flavours.

*BERG slaps a bit of jam on his toast while
ADA works on her eggs. BERG has a bite.
Makes a sour face.*

BERG

Something is missing alright ... Must be the artificial flavours.

ADA

You're too picky.

BERG

You know I have a sensitive stomach.

(reads newspaper)

Oh, Christ. Listen to this ... "Homeless LA woman costs taxpayers over three hundred thousand dollars."

ADA

How in heavens ... for being homeless? That must be a mistake. I swear, they'll print anything to sell papers.

BERG

(slaps the paper)

No mistake, hon. It's right here in black and white. See, in LAs, homeless people are allowed to sleep on sidewalks but they must be awake and moving by six a.m., or they can be arrested.

ADA

For being homeless?

BERG

Can't have people sleeping on the streets. Sets a bad example ... encourages people to be lazy good for nothing freeloaders.

ADA

If Weldon was sleeping on the street, you'd need a super-sonic alarm clock to wake him up that early. I suppose they could carry him to jail but they'd need a stretcher.

BERG

Weldon will never, ever live on the street.

ADA

Maybe the police are over-reacting. Don't you think --

BERG

Over-reacting? Not on your life, hon. What this does ... it gives the city a bad image, makes the authorities look bad, like they don't know what they're doing.

(more)

BERG (cont'd)

That's why patrol cars roll by with loudspeakers and rouse those lazy slobs with polite but firm calls of "GOOD MORNING! RISE AND SHINE! NOW GET YOUR ASS MOVING!"

ADA

That still wouldn't wake up Weldon.

BERG

Our boy will never live on the street. Don't even think that.

ADA

So where do they go?

BERG

Who?

ADA

The homeless. Where do they go?

BERG

Who knows? The law says they must move and if those five thousand on skid row don't comply, they can be charged.

ADA

I still don't understand how that poor homeless woman cost taxpayers so much money.

BERG

Patience, hon, Says here ... This destitute seventy-year old grandmother has been arrested sixty-nine times in ten years --

ADA

Good Lord! For sleeping on the street?

BERG

For breaking the law. She's been tried twenty-six times, convicted sixteen times and jailed a total of seventeen months.

ADA

Seems a bit harsh, sweetie. Lord, what's the world coming to?

BERG

If she worked for a living and paid taxes like the rest of us, she'd haul her sweet ass off the street faster than you can say, 'Good morning, Uncle Sam. Crazy woman refuses to go to a shelter.'

ADA

I suppose some people just don't know what's good for them.

BERG

Have you ever heard anything so ridiculous? If that's not crazy, I don't know what the hell is.

ADA
Thank God, we don't live in LA.

BERG
Amen to that.

ADA
Can't they do something? I mean --

BERG
They are. They're getting them off the street. Our government just can't dish out money to whoever puts their greedy hands out. They do that, it's socialism and socialism's just one tiny step away from communism.

ADA
I know but --

BERG
Problem is, no one wants to work. I wish they'd all go back where they came from.

ADA
Yes hon but a lot of people are out of work because --

BERG slams his fist on the table. Cups rattle. coffee spills.

BERG
If I had a dollar for every time I heard that!

ADA stares at him, then cleans up the mess with a napkin.

ADA
What in heave's name has gotten into you?

BERG
Sorry. I ... I didn't sleep much.
(takes a deep breath)

If everyone pulled their weight, this country wouldn't be in such a big mess. If someone wants to work, they'll find it.

ADA
You need a sound proof room.

BERG
Now that would be heaven. If only we could afford it.

BERG flips a page, chews on his toast.

BERG
Speaking of work, I'll be home late tonight.

ADA

Again? I hardly ever see you anymore.

BERG

You're seeing me now, aren't you?

ADA

I was going to make a roast. I'll keep it warm in the stove.

ADA takes a section of the paper. Reads.

BERG

I have a ton of paper work to plough through. When Mr Butterworth wants something ... Oh God. Red Sox lost again.

ADA

Dear Lord! Listen to this ...

BERG

You have my undivided attention.

ADA

(reads)

"Tea, waffles and flesh-eating fish ...

(laughs, continues reading)

Travelers to South Korea may have heard of Dr Fish Cafes where for the price of tea or waffles, customers can plunge their feet into tanks of fish who will eagerly nibble their dead skin off and leave feet smooth and soft ..."

BERG

And I thought all the lunatics lived in the north. It pains me to say this but the world's getting crazier by the minute.

ADA

Seems that way.

(continues reading)

"Customers choose between a tank of little fish and bigger fish." It doesn't sound so bad. "A waiter disinfects your feet ... and only then, you stick your feet in the tank ..."

(giggles)

"The fish go into a feeding frenzy." I think I'd go with the little fish tank. You wouldn't go for any tank, right sweetie?

BERG

Not even if they paid me.

ADA removes her slippers. Checks her feet,

ADA

I wonder if this fish tank treatment might help? Wore my new sneakers yesterday shopping. Got blisters.

She puts them back on.

ADA

Want to go to South Korea?

BERG

I have more than enough to worry about at Sleepy Inn, thanks. Oh, oh. Look at the time. I'd better get going. Before I forget, I'll be home later tonight. Have a few errands to run.

ADA

I thought you said you had paper work to catch up on?

BERG

Guess I'm still half-asleep. I also have a few errands to run, in addition to the mountain of paper work piling on my desk. Children okay?

They stand. ADA finishes her coffee.

ADA

They're fine. They start school tomorrow.

BERG

Another summer's gone by. Kids doing anything special today?

ADA steps over to the fridge, takes out a paper bag and hands it to Berg.

ADA

Melissa's helping me bake zucchini bread and Weldon promised he'd mow the lawn. I might take them shopping later.

They kiss. Separate.

BERG

Thank you. Bye!

*LIGHTS dim as BERG leaves kitchen, EXITS
S.R. ADA turns the CD player back on,
clears the table.*

CD PLAYER AND ADA

The men will cheer and the boys will shout, The ladies they will all turn out ...

Scene 2:

Almost noon, the same day. The SOUND OF A BLENDER at work.

LIGHTS up on ADA and MELISSA, her 14 year old pretty feisty daughter, in blue jeans, an old plaid shirt, in the kitchen.

The table is cluttered with baking pans, dishes, spoons, a bag of sugar, a bag of flour, baking powder, cartons of broken eggs and anything else which suggests they've been busy for a while.

A recipe book is on the counter next to the blender. ADA turns off the blender. The oven door is open. A number of filled pans are already in the oven.

MELISSA

We're done? Already?

ADA pours out the last of the mixed batter into last pan.

ADA

As soon as we put these last two pans in the oven.

MELISSA

I can do that.

ADA

Thank you, sweetie.

MELISSA puts the filled pans into the oven. ADA shuts the oven door, sets the bake control and timer.

ADA

I usually set the timer for fifty-five minutes but sixty is fine. The wonderful thing about zucchini bread is that you can freeze it and it's good for ages.

MELISSA

You sure made a lot. Is that all for us?

ADA

No, dear. Parish is having a bake sale. Now you know how to make zucchini bread.

MELISSA

I'll never be as good as you, mom. No way. Not in a million years.

ADA

Practice makes perfect. Now we'll let the oven earn its keep while we clean up.

*ADA and MELISSA start clearing the table.
With soapy water already in the sink,
MELISSA starts washing the dishes.*

ADA

Weldon should be finished cutting the grass by now.

MELISSA

Uh, Mom, I don't think he's started yet.

ADA

It's almost noon. What's he waiting for?

MELISSA

I bet he's still playing his dumb 'Super soldier' video game. He was up all night making strange noises. Woke me up twice.

ADA

What do you mean, strange?

MELISSA

They're just really weird. You should see the look on his face when he's playing that brainless game. He gets so excited. Probably high fives himself when he makes a kill. Dummy thinks he's Rambo ...

(laughs)

Saving the world from other lunatics. I don't know who's crazier - Weldon or the morons who made the stupid game.

ADA

No name calling, sweetie.

ADA steps out of the kitchen.

ADA

Weldon! Don't forget you promised to mow the lawn today!

ADA returns to the kitchen.

MELISSA

Doubt he heard you, mom. An atomic bomb could go off, he wouldn't have a clue.

ADA

Please run up and tell him to come down. I'll finish cleaning.

MELISSA

Okay but he won't listen to me. He never does.

*MELISSA wipes her hands clean, EXITS while
ADA takes over cleaning the dishes.*