

Blue Balloons

Greg Shelton

Characters:

Mama

Papa

Mr. Jennings, Neighbor.

Deacon Jennings,

Mr. Jennings, Shop Supervisor

(A very middle class living room. Preparations are being made for a 4th of July party. As the curtain rises, Papa is on stage surrounded by dozens of blue balloons.)

PAPA: Blue Balloons! (Kicks the balloons) Damn blue balloons! (Kicks them more frantically) Couldn't be red balloons like last time, but goddam blue balloons. (Kicks them even more frantically.)

MAMA: (Entering carrying a turkish waterpipe which she is smoking. Sits down, puffs on pipe, and watches Father) Did you say something, papa?

PAPA: I hate blue balloons! Dammit! Why don't we have red balloons like last time?

MAMA: You didn't like the advertising on the red balloons, dear.

PAPA: Yeah, well, I'd rather have the red balloons with advertising, than these stupid, dull, depressing blue balloons! I hate blue balloons.

MAMA: Well, hang them up anyway, dear. The guests will be here at any time.

PAPA: What are you going to feed the guests? [he exits]

MAMA: Apple pie.

PAPA: (Off stage) With or with out an upper crust. I hate an upper crust.

MAMA: The guests like it, dear. They always do.

PAPA: I hate, hate, hate it! (Papa reenters carrying a paint can and large brush. He sits on the middle of the living room floor and begins to paint the balloons red.)

MAMA: (Screams) What do you think you're doing? (Pause) You're going to get paint inside your finger nails and never be able to get it out before the guests get here. Besides, you had better put the flag up dear. We should have a flag at a 4th of July party.

PAPA: (With dull resignation) Yes, mama. (Exits again)

MAMA: I hope you're not too disappointed about the apple pie. But like Franklin used to say, you can't have your cake and eat it too.

PAPA: (Re-enters with American Flag which he hangs upside down) Platitudes, platitudes! Your conversation is full of trivia, did you know that!

MAMA: Stupid! Look how you're putting up the flag. Stupid, stupid. The field goes on the LEFT!

PAPA: (Turns flag around so that the blue is on the left, but the flag is still upside down) I just wish you could listen to yourself sometime. You use so many cliches that it makes me sick. Physically ill. Just like these damn blue balloons and your stupid, doughy apple pie.

MAMA: Try to calm yourself, papa, before all the guests arrive.

PAPA: Yeah, well at the shop party, we had red balloons. We had white ones, too. I took my cigarette and popped all their blue balloons. (laughs loudly) Jesus, I hate blue balloons!

(Doorbell rings)

MAMA: Our guests are arriving.

PAPA: Or it could be a telegram.

MAMA: Or a special delivery.

PAPA: Or a fire chief.

MAMA: Or the gestapo.

PAPA: Or (He opens the door) Our guests (disappointed)

MR. JENNINGS: Ah, good evening.

PAPA: Yes, and a happy 4th of July. Did you have trouble finding our house?

MR. JENNINGS: No, I live right here in the neighborhood, remember?

PAPA: Oh, yes.

MR. JENNINGS: As a matter of fact, I live right next door.

PAPA: Oh, yes. Say, mama. It's our neighbor, Mr. Jennings. He's come to our party.

MAMA: Hello, neighbor Jennings. Won't you come in.

MR. JENNINGS: (Brushes off snow) Yes, well, thanks.

PAPA: Unusual weather we're having.

MR. JENNINGS: Yes, quite. What kind of food do you have?

MAMA: Apple pie.

MR. JENNINGS: With or without an upper crust?

MAMA: With.

MR. JENNINGS: (Screws up his face) Oh. (Pause) But I see you have blue balloons. I remember the last party when you had red balloons with "Murphy's" printed on them. Did you get them free?

MAMA: The blue one, or the red ones with advertising?

MR. JENNINGS: The red ones.

MAMA: I don't remember.

MR. JENNINGS: Well, then, the blue ones.

MAMA: I don't remember.

MR. JENNINGS: Well, I don't suppose its too important.

MAMA: No.

PAPA: (Back to painting the balloons) I heard this fine joke at the office the other day.

MAMA: But you don't work at an office, dear.

PAPA: Well, maybe our son told it to me.

MAMA: We don't have any children.

PAPA: Dammit! I heard a joke! (Scowls at Mama) It seems there was this window washer who fell from a tall building and landed on his jaw. He was taken to the hospital and this awful cast was put over his whole face so he couldn't eat.

MAMA: Did they feed him intravenously?

PAPA: No, they couldn't. Well, after three days he began to get pretty damn hungry, so he called for the nurse. "Nurse, nurse, I'm hungry," says he. "I gotta have something to eat!" Well, the nurse went to get him some hot chocolate to pump it in through his anus.

But as she pumped it in, he screamed, "NURSE, NURSE!" Then the nurse says, "What'sa matter, is it too hot?" "No," says he, "It's too damn sweet!" (laughs broadly)

MR. JENNINGS: (Does not smile) That's a very nice joke. I told it to you at our last party.

PAPA: Oh.

MR. JENNINGS: (sipping tea that was on the table) I would like to stay and chat for a while, but I have much more important things to do. Will you get my things? (Although Mr. Jennings entered bare headed, Papa gives Mr. Jennings a hat. He still has on his coat.)

PAPA: Well, it really doesn't make any difference. We have other guests coming, you know.

MR. JENNINGS: Charming party. So sorry I have to rush off. Ta Ta. (He exits)

MAMA: I just love Mr. Jennings. He's so witty. He really knows how to tell a joke.

PAPA: Yes. Witty. (Starts to paint the balloons again. One breaks, but he paints it anyway, then hangs it up.)

(The doorbell rings.)

PAPA: More goddam guests.

MAMA: Or bill collectors.

PAPA: Or the service man.

MAMA: Or neighborhood pranksters.

PAPA: Or the garbage man.

MAMA: Or (opens door) Deacon Jennings! So glad to see you.

JENNINGS: (Same man as before, dressed exactly the same) The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

MAMA: Oh. What a wise, wise man! Papa, it's Deacon Jennings, here to bring us the word on this night of nights.

PAPA: Good evening, Deacon. (Hangs up a large crucifix. The cross is painted a striped red, white, blue)

JENNINGS: A very blessed and good evening to you, my brother.

MAMA: Would you like some tea? (Offers same cup as Mr. Jennings had)

JENNINGS: A most generous gesture.

MAMA: And some apple pie?

JENNINGS: (Meekly) Does it have an upper crust?

MAMA: Yes.

JENNINGS: No, thank you. The Lord hath not given me facilities to digest great quantities of dough. The Lord giveth and the Lord

taketh away.

MAMA: (in awe) How beautiful!

PAPA: Say, Deacon, would you like to hear a fine story that Mama just told me?

MAMA: (embarrassed) Papa.

JENNINGS: I should be ever so delighted.

PAPA: Well, once there was a window washer, a good, Christian man. But one day he profaned the Lord, and the lord saw fit to let him fall from a building and land on his good Christian jaw. He was taken to a good Christian hospital where a good Christian nurse cared for him until he was again in the Lord's blessing, then he was released into God's Good Christian world!

JENNINGS: (laughs hardily) You really know how to tell a story! It is a gift from God.

PAPA: Aw.

JENNINGS: Well, the Lord God tells me through my bladder that it's time for me to use your facilities, if I may.

MAMA: Why, of course, Deacon. They are just through the door and to the left. (Deacon Jennings exists to the bathroom)

JENNINGS: The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away!

MAMA: Ah, what a man of wit and insight!

PAPA: And he likes good jokes!

MAMA: It's a real shame that all people can't be like that. (The door bell rings.)

MAMA: More guests.

PAPA: It seems we have to be charming for a while longer, mama. (opens door) Why, Mama, it's my boss! (Hangs up dollar sign painted red, white, blue)

(Mr. Jennings again enters, dressed the same)

JENNINGS: So nice of you to invite me to your petty little party in your crummy little house.

MAMA: W-won't you come in, sir. T-tea?

JENNINGS: Canadian Club.

MAMA: (Hands him the same cup as others) W-weather we're having.

JENNINGS: Yes, weather.

PAPA: How do you like our humble little house, sir?

JENNINGS: Pretty good considering your crummy wages. (Looks around.) Blue balloons. My favorite! Some ass popped all the blue balloons at the shop party. I'd kill the sonovabitch if I found

out who it was.

PAPA: What a horrid thing to do! But you know me. I was just remarking to Mama here how much I like blue balloons.

Mama here how much I like blue balloons.

MAMA: You'll never really know how fond he is of blue balloons!

JENNINGS: Blue balloons. (wistfully) God, I wish I could find out who it was. He'd be fired so fast. . .

MAMA: Er. How about some nice apple pie? It has an upper crust, but I can cut it off if you want.

JENNINGS: I like the upper crust.

MAMA: (Mumbles) Upper crust for the upper crust.

PAPA: Mr. Jennings, sir. I heard a funny story on T.V. last night.

JENNINGS: So. . .

PAPA: Well, I though I might relate it to you.

JENNINGS: Well, I won't like it.

PAPA: It's about a window washer who collected blue balloons.

JENNINGS: Not interested.

PAPA: Oh. (meekly)

MAMA: Your pie, Mr. Jennings, sir.

JENNINGS: It looks moldy. I'm getting sick of your stupid, bourgeois party anyway. I've got to go home and look at my bank book, and my check book, and my stock certificates, and my lovely bonds, and all the loose change around the house. Goodby. Nice party for people in your circumstances.

PAPA: I'm awfully sorry, your highness.

JENNINGS: Its not your fault. It's socio-economic differences. Don't dwell on it, man.

MAMA: Well, we are truly sorry.

PAPA: Sorry.

MAMA: Extremely.

PAPA: Sorry.

MAMA: Forever.

PAPA: Sorry.

MAMA: Sorry.

PAPA: Sorry.

JENNINGS: Well, I won't hold this against you at the shop. You can depend on me. (He exits)

PAPA: (sighs)

MAMA: (sighs)

PAPA: Nice party this year.

MAMA: Much better than last year's.
 PAPA: Much.
 MAMA: Yes, much.
 PAPA: Well, I suppose we should put away the decorations.
 MAMA: Use two boxes dear. One for the balloons, and one for the air.
 PAPA: A fine idea.
 MAMA: Yes, if you put them together, the air will just ruin the balloons.
 PAPA: Ruin.
 MAMA: Just ruin.
 PAPA: Stain, too.
 MAMA: Rust.
 PAPA: Corrode.
 MAMA: Ruin.
 PAPA: Just ruin.
 PAPA: (all of a sudden excitedly) What about Deacon Jennings?
 MAMA: Is he still in the . . . ?
 PAPA: I had better go see. (rushes out)
 MAMA: (Sits smoking her water pipe.)
 PAPA: (re-enters) He's gone! All gone. I think he flushed himself down.
 MAMA: Damn. We'll have to call a plumber to get it unstopped.
 (Curtain)

These few stifled feelings

Vicki Kessinger

These few stifled feelings for you by morning
 I'll ferret out
 and the warm coursing of them will congeal
 to silver-thinned strands wound in the chambers
 of my soul.
 And you'll ask me how and look at the blood morning sky
 dissipated to grey iron threads . . .
 by then I should be up the staircase.