

## A WALK IN THE PARK

### Characters

Jenny, a young black woman, a teenager

Ida-Lee, an older black woman, late sixties

Mrs. David, an older white woman, early fifties

Patrick, a young, slightly effeminate, gay man

The scene is a bare stage. Each person in a chair particular to their personal tastes, there is a pool of light on each, which they may act within; but never enter each others' light.

### JENNY

*(Mopping her brow with a white handkerchief.)*

Honey, come here. I got somethin' to tell ya. Honey, in the summer — every summer in New Orleans — it gets so dang hot here — not just hot; but sticky with the heat — like dried molasses on cheap Formica — no matter how many times you take a dish cloth to it, it's still sticky.

### IDA-LEE

*(With a hand fan trying in vain to cool herself.)*

Oh, let me tell you, Sugar, this one day, I can't remember which — in the summer, when it's this hot, all the days seem to run together in a sultry blur —

### MRS. DAVID

*(Opens an umbrella against the sun. Satisfied.)*

I remember every day as clear as a bell.

### PATRICK

Girl, I have to tell you about the most bizarre incident. Remember, last August when it was so hot the bars practically dried up?

### JENNY

It's so dad-blasted hot you just want to shuck-off all your clothes and run around naked, just to feel some air on your skin again. You know what I mean, Honey?

### IDA-LEE

Jenny. That is no way to go on.

### JENNY

I cain't help it, Mama. It's so dang hot, I'm spittin' cotton.

### IDA-LEE

*(Calmly but firmly.)*

Don't you go talking like that, Jenny. "Spittin' cotton," ain't a proper way for a young woman to talk!

### JENNY

Sorry, Mama.

### PATRICK

Well, I was just settling in to my new two bedroom apartment in the Lower Garden district. You know getting unpacked, moving boxes from one room to the other.

**IDA-LEE**

On my way to work — this particular day — the Elysian Fields bus broke down on Frenchman, and we all got out to wait for another. I decided to walk through the French Quarter and catch the Magazine bus on Canal Street.

**MRS. DAVID**

It was a Tuesday. It was my “Ladies Day.” “Ladies Day” is always on the first Tuesday of the month.

**PATRICK**

It was just a few days into the month — I hadn’t even been there a week — and I’m heading down the hall with a huge box of Mardi Gras costumes, and the air conditioner goes out!

**IDA-LEE**

I happened by Jackson Square, where they offer those carriage rides to tourists — oh, those drivers do tell the most outrageous lies about New Orleans’ history!

**MRS. DAVID**

I have what my husband, Cuthbert, used to call a “photogenic mind.”

**PATRICK**

I mean just goes completely out and I have all that unpacking to do!

**IDA-LEE**

I was already angry with myself for having a quarrel with my girl.

**JENNY**

I told my mama, “It’s so dang hot, I’m spittin’ cotton!”

**MRS. DAVID**

He meant “photographic” —

**PATRICK**

I mean, I’ve got boxes and boxes of Mardi Gras costumes to go through — you know, ‘cause Southern Decadence is coming up and I haven’t even been thinking about what to wear, ‘cause I’ve been so busy moving and all.

**IDA-LEE**

Don’t you go talking like that, Jenny! “Spittin’ cotton,” ain’t a proper way for a young woman to talk!

**JENNY**

She didn’t slap me or nothing, but Mama never yells — except when it’s absolutely necessary — or when it’s hot.

**MRS. DAVID**

He said, “Deidre, you have the most photogenic mind; but you’re all out of film.”

**PATRICK**

So, I call my landlord on his cell phone — and Girl, I let him have an earful.

**IDA-LEE**

Everybody’s kind-a testy when the summer heat comes blasting like a furnace and the devil’s just a fanning the flames, hoping some nice girl will slip and say something she’ll regret later.

**JENNY**

It's the kind of heat that has a sheen to it — a heat you can see — it rises off the cobbles on the street and distorts the air — so everything appears hazy and warped — kind of like the whole world is melting.

**IDA-LEE**

One of the carriage horses was foaming at the mouth and chewing on his bridal something fierce. I mean, I am not a veterinarian or anything but that animal had hydrophobia or something —

**MRS. DAVID**

I told him, "Cuthbert, you don't mean photogenic; you mean photographic." Cuthbert just don't have the good sense God gave a goose sometimes and he says the most outlandish things!

**PATRICK**

Well, I guess I was hot or something, 'cause he hangs up on me — and Girl, you know how much I hate that!

**IDA-LEE**

I'd of probably never noticed that horse, except that I had stopped to cross myself in front of the cathedral.

**JENNY**

We don't have no air conditioner, just one of them oscillating fans — but, Honey, when it's so hot the whole world is melting, that fan don't do no good.

**IDA-LEE**

Why, it scared the B-Jesus out of me, I'll tell you. I gave that "hydrophobic-animal" a wide berth, all the time keeping a masterful eye on him —

**MRS. DAVID**

But I always overlooked Cuthbert's inequities — I didn't marry Cuthbert for his mind — everybody knows that.

**PATRICK**

So, I try to stay calm — which is hard to do when it's so damn hot — and I calmly hit redial and when he answers I calmly explain to him that I don't fucking appreciate it when somebody hangs up on me. And the son-of-a-bitch hangs up on me again!

**JENNY**

That oscillating fan just moves that hot air over here, then it moves that hot air over there and the oppressive heat runs folks clean out of their houses to set on the stoop where maybe a whisper of a breeze off the river will come strolling by and pretend to linger — just long enough to remind you what a cool breeze used to feel like.

**IDA-LEE**

My Grandpa told me that, "Always look an animal straight in the eye — Don't be scared — Keep a masterful eye on him."

**MRS. DAVID**

Oh, I have to admit, it gets mighty hot here — even with all the trees around our

Garden District home — we have a home in the Garden District — that’s where the Americans settled, you know — and even with all those trees, it gets close.

**PATRICK**

So, by now, I am boiling! But I think, fine, I’ll call in one of those air conditioner guys, you know the ones I mean, you see them all over town in their shorts and matching shirts, and their muscles just bulging.

**JENNY**

Oh, and Honey, do I ever miss a cool breeze in the summer when the whole world is melting.

**IDA-LEE**

So I was staring that horse down — we was both looking right at each other and let me tell you, that animal’s eyes was plum wild — like he seen something terrifying.

**MRS. DAVID**

The air gets so full of summer it is positively impossible to take a full breath.

**PATRICK**

So, I call the air conditioner guy and some woman answers. I know, Girl, ask me how disappointed I was! And she’s like, “Can I help you?” Real snotty like that.

**JENNY**

I decided I had to do something to cool myself off — and propriety — and a city ordinance — kept me from ripping off my clothes and scandalizing the whole parish.

**IDA-LEE**

Then that horse just keeled right over — dead as the post he was hitched to.

**MRS. DAVID**

And even with all of Cuthbert’s money, he won’t allow me to turn on the air conditioner. Which is positively criminal. Cuthbert says, “If you HAD to have a Garden District home, and you HAD to have it restored to its original condition, then you shouldn’t expect air conditioning.” Which is the most ridiculous thing I have ever in all my born days heard of — just ‘cause they didn’t have air conditioning in the 1890’s doesn’t mean I have to absolutely expire in the summer of 2004, now does it?

**PATRICK**

Well, I tell her what an emergency this is — you know, with Southern Decadence coming and I’ve got to get unpacked — and I tell her I need help today and she says, “Our first opening is in September.” I know — well, you can’t expect heterosexuals to understand the importance of getting ready for Southern Decadence.

**JENNY**

So, the only civilized thing left to do was to head over to this park in the Lower Garden District, where there was some shade and that old fountain — the one that sprays water straight up. There’s a park over here — in what folks calls the “new” Marigny; but it ain’t got no fountain.

**IDA-LEE**

That dang horse hit the ground so hard, the water in the trough sloshed up and soaked my shoes.

**MRS. DAVID**

Cuthbert says, “You may insist on having the largest mansion in the Garden District, Deidre, but that doesn’t mean I am obligated to cool every room.”

**PATRICK**

So, I tell her, “Look bitch, let me talk to your supervisor.” Well, no Girl, I didn’t actually call her a bitch; but I let her know I meant business.

**JENNY**

And I knew that once in a while, a little breeze off the river can catch that fountain-spray and mist the heat away. So, that’s where I went, to the park in the Lower Garden District for some shade and a fountain mist.

**IDA-LEE**

It just absolutely ruined my shoes — the red ones with the little straps around the ankles. Absolutely ruined them.

**MRS. DAVID**

Well, everybody knows, we don’t own the “largest” mansion in the Garden District. My Cuthbert always was a man given to exaggeration. The only time Cuthbert allows me to turn on the air conditioner is when we’re expecting company. So, naturally, I have company as often as possible.

**PATRICK**

And then finally I get to talk to this positively masculine voice — who also happens to be a supervisor — and gay — I know, we’re everywhere. And he totally understands how important this is — he’s never missed a Decadence parade — and promises to send someone out within the hour.

**JENNY**

Now, I do not — as a rule — like to “play in the fountain.”

**IDA-LEE**

And the tourists were herding their children away from that carcass as if the old “Yellow Jack” plague had done returned to kill the weak and weary.

**MRS. DAVID**

And I tell Miss Ida-Lee, my precious Miss Ida-Lee — who’s been with the David family since Cuthbert was just a little thing — I tell Miss Ida-Lee we got to turn on that air conditioner early if we want the house cooled down by the time company arrives.

**PATRICK**

So, I’m sitting there, fantasizing about what this air conditioning guy is going to look like — and I’ve got my heart set on Brad Pitt or George Clooney or Jean-Claude Van Dame in matching shirt and shorts.

**JENNY**

And my mama would skin me alive if she knew I was to play in that there fountain.

**IDA-LEE**

That horse dyin' right there in front of the cathedral, was such a shock. It just plain ruined the tourist business — and my red shoes.

**MRS. DAVID**

But of course, this particular day, the transit system of New Orleans — which is about as reliable as a findin' crawfish at a restaurant in August — that Elysian Fields bus broke down and Ida-Lee was so late, I had to turn on the air conditioner and answer the door myself. I mean, you can't expect the genteel ladies of the Garden District to sit around perspiring until they positively glisten!

**PATRICK**

And I wait and wait. And sweat and sweat. Oh my God, Girl, the heat is so draining and I'm thinking I'm not going to have the energy to do anything no matter which celebrity he looks like.

**JENNY**

And you know, if you live in New Orleans, that somebody knows your Mama and is just bustin' a vein to tell her when you're bein' less than a proper, well-brung-up child. But it was so dang hot; I figured it'd be worth a whipping to soak my feet in that there fountain. And besides, I figured, it was so dang hot that Mama would probably just give me one of her withering-looks, 'cause it would take too much energy to whip me. Oh, honey, when you're black, it don't matter how big you get, your Mama can still whup ya!

**IDA-LEE**

Well, I took myself right on to work, where I knowed Ms. David was expecting her lady-friends for the day, it being the first Tuesday of the month. And I could put my wet shoes in her Kenmore oven — on low.

**MRS. DAVID**

So, there we were all nice and cool — sitting around in the second parlor, sipping our sweet-tea with mint. Miss Ida-Lee always puts fresh mint in my sweet-tea and I had to forgive her tardiness, since she had made the tea the day before and served in a chilled cut-glass pitcher in chilled glasses.

**PATRICIK**

And so I call the company back — you know, just to politely find out the E.T.A. of Mr. Hunky to fix my air conditioner.

**JENNY**

Oh, the water in that fountain was so nice and cool. One of the little children — dog-paddled by — and asked me if I'd like him to splash me and I said, "Sure!"

**IDA-LEE**

Ms. David likes her tea sweet...

*(Rolls her eyes for emphasis.)*

'cause her people's from Georgia.

**MRS. DAVID**

My family is from Atlanta — Georgia, you know, and we always had our tea "sweet" in Georgia. Tea without a hefty helping of sugar in it is just uncivilized.

**PATRICK**

And naturally, I get Miss Bitch again. Who is just as snotty as ever. And she says — real snooty like — “I’m sorry, Mr. Flynn, I can’t help you with that information.” I mean really, doesn’t she get training?

**JENNY**

Well, that little dog-paddlin’ boy kicked up such a wave that I liked to drown!

**IDA-LEE**

I tried to tell her — and Mr. Cuthbert tried to tell her — folks in New Orleans — ‘specially the Garden District — they don’t like their tea sweet; but she’s kind-a hard-headed and she won’t allow me to serve nothing else.

**MRS. DAVID**

When I married Cuthbert — and moved to New Orleans — well, I sure was glad Miss Ida-Lee takes instructions. Miss Ida-Lee does as she’s told — and Cuthbert — him bein’ so prone to exaggeration and all — he said I just could not find a soul in New Orleans to make tea sweet.

**PATRICK**

So I say, “Look, Miss Bitch, you obviously don’t know how to talk to your customers, let me talk with that guy again.” Well, no, I didn’t call her Miss Bitch, but the tone in my voice told her all she needed to know. And she says, “What guy?” And I say, “The supervisor I was speaking to before, when I called and you couldn’t help me.” And she says, “I’m sorry, Sir, but you’ll need to be more specific, we have over thirty supervisors and I will need to have the name to connect you.”

**IDA-LEE**

Ms. David even come in the kitchen — which she had never done before — and showed me how to put the sugar in that tea while it was still boilin’ — like I was too dad-blamed dumb to realize how to do it right.

**JENNY**

But I liked it — it was kind-a refreshin’!

**MRS. DAVID**

I had to show her how to make it. You have to put the sugar in — a whole cup, new — while it’s still boilin’ — so the sugar will dissolve completely, you see?

**PATRICK**

Well, by this time I am boiling! So I say to her, “He’s the gay one. He’s very nice. He’s very friendly. And — unlike you — he does his job.”

**IDA-LEE**

It’s like drinkin’ a praline!

**JENNY**

That boy’s mama, snatched him up and said, “What were you thinkin’?” And wore that boy out. I tried to tell her I told him he could splash me; but she gave him one of those every-word-whippin’s — you know...

*(She illustrates by swatting the rump of a child on each word.)*

“I — Told — You’s — To Be — Careful!”

**IDA-LEE**

Well, I added about two cups of bourbon to it, and them women didn’t mind the sweet at all!

**MRS. DAVID**

Sweet tea is a tradition in the “Deep South” — Now, I read that the “Deep South” is somewhere North of New Orleans.

**PATRICK**

And the bitch hangs up on me!

**JENNY**

And that boy’s mama, just apologized and kept sayin’ how his daddy was gonna wear him out when he got home.

**IDA-LEE**

And, on a hot day — like it was that first Tuesday in August — those women always have two or three of them sweet teas.

**MRS. DAVID**

When Ida-Lee comes in with that tray filled with all that chilled cut-glass — well, I don’t know which sparkled more, that cut-glass or the eyes of my “Ladies Day” participants. And when we have all finished our second glass of sweet tea, Mrs. Guidry announces that we are all going down to the park — ‘cause it’s the anniversary of her daddy’s demise — and she wants to put rose petals in his fountain.

**PATRICK**

So, naturally, I call back and this time low-and-behold I get someone else. It seems Miss Bitch is getting her butt chewed out for talking so rudely to the customers! Well, no, they didn’t say that; they said she was taking a much needed break — but that’s probably what they meant, you could read between the lines.

**JENNY**

And I got to thinking, “That’s what’s wrong with most of these kids today.”

**IDA-LEE**

I even had one myself, since I had the oven on low and it was making the kitchen even hotter.

**MRS. DAVID**

That huge fountain down there in the park is a monument to her daddy’s passing. It is positively the most blatant display of ostentaciousness — and a waste of good money — it’s so big all the little children think it’s a wading pool.

**PATRICK**

I’m getting to the good part, Girl. Quit asking how big it is!

**JENNY**

Nobody's teaching them kids what's proper.

**IDA-LEE**

My shoes dried real nice; but I swear that leather must-a shrunk or something.

**MRS. DAVID**

But every year, we all have to go staggering down there in the heat of summer just so Mrs. Guidry can toss rose petals in the water.

**PATRICK**

So, while I'm on the phone for the THIRD time, trying to get someone over to fix my air conditioner, my door buzzer rings!

**JENNY**

I mean, when I was a child, every parent in the neighborhood could snatch me up and scold me something fierce if I was doing something wrong.

**IDA-LEE**

So, I had me another one — but without the sweet tea — I mean; why ruin good bourbon?

**MRS. DAVID**

If only her daddy would have had the decency to pass away in the spring or fall, it wouldn't be so awful.

**PATRICK**

So, I go flying down the stairs to let him in — all the while imagining Brad, or George, or Jean-Claude, standing there all sweaty and hot.

**JENNY**

And then they'd call your folks and tell 'em what you did and you'd get another whipping when you got home.

**IDA-LEE**

Then, Ms. David rings — I hate that dang bell — especially in summer when it's hot and my shoes has shrunk — and Ms. David says I should prepare a luncheon for the "Ladies" as they are going to the park.

**MRS. DAVID**

So, of course, we have to take the Saint Charles streetcar, which is always full of tourists like it's some kind of Disney World ride.

**PATRICK**

And it's my landlord. He says he's going to take a look at it, before he calls in a professional.

**JENNY**

And nobody today is teachin' kids manners and right from wrong.

**IDA-LEE**

So, I make some cucumber sandwiches — 'cause they're cold and they'll hold up in the heat.

**MRS. DAVID**

Oh, don't get me started on the tourists — coming down Washington Avenue,

with their self-guided walking-tour maps and pointing at my bougainvillea like they've never seen a plant before.

**PATRICK**

And I'm trying to tell him that I am sweltering in that apartment and I need air now.

**JENNY**

Oh, my mama made certain we always acted proper. "Like a lady," she'd say.

**IDA-LEE**

Then Ms. David says, "Ida-Lee, you come along and serve."

**MRS. DAVID**

And when I ring to ask Ida-Lee if she would accompany us to the park — she doesn't answer right-off, like I've told her I prefer — so I excuse myself as now I have to go all the way back to the kitchen —

**PATRICK**

No, he's a hetero. He wouldn't understand an emergency. Girl, it doesn't matter what he looked like.

**JENNY**

Mama was always a "stickler" when it comes to being ladylike and proper.

**IDA-LEE**

Well, I don't know, it might-a been the heat, or my shrunken shoes, or maybe I just still had me the heebie-jeebies over that dead horse; but I just snapped.

**MRS. DAVID**

Well, that silly old fool had the oven on! Hotter than blue-blazes in that house — Cuthbert's electricity runnin' the air conditioner — and that silly old fool's got the oven on!

**PATRICK**

So, my landlord comes in and checks the thermostat. Girl, of course it's central heat and air! What do you think I am, primitive?

**JENNY**

That's why I was so shocked when mama told me she'd quit her job.

**IDA-LEE**

I yelled at her.

**MRS. DAVID**

She shouted at me.

**PATRICK**

And he shouts at me! Right in my face!

**JENNY**

She actually screamed at her — and my mama's not the kind of woman to scream at anyone — even us kids.

**IDA-LEE**

I told her my shoes was wet, I was dryin' them in the oven and now they's too

small to put on and she can serve her own damn sandwiches.

**MRS. DAVID AND JENNY AND PATRICK**  
(*Together.*)

I was shocked.

**IDA-LEE**

I even surprised myself.

**MRS. DAVID**

It positively ruined our “outing.” I mean I could hardly be expected to serve my own sandwiches. So, we didn’t even go — ‘ceptin’ of course Pauline Guidry — who had to go. It bein’ the anniversary of her dead daddy and all.

**PATRICK**

Oh, I guess I bumped the stupid switch on the thermostat moving boxes or something. Well, Girl, that is a STUPID place to put a switch, right on the front like that where it can get bumped!

**JENNY**

But mama got herself another job, a much nicer job.

**IDA-LEE**

And when Ms. Guidry heard that I had quit, she followed me all the way to the bus stop on Magazine to offer me another job, insistin’ that I call her Miss Pauline. She even rode with me down to the park, where she insisted I get off with her and pay my respects to her dead daddy.

**MRS. DAVID**

Pauline Guidry, sabotaged my happy home and stole my help. Cuthbert was absolutely livid! He said, “Ida-Lee has been with this family longer than you have,” which is positively the most cruel thing he’s ever said to me.

**PATRICK**

So, I have to go all the way downstairs to let the stupid landlord out ‘cause he doesn’t have a key! Imagine! What an idiot.

**JENNY**

And when mama showed up at the park and yanked me out of that fountain, with Ms Guidry squawking like a old hen, sayin’ “Get outta there! Get outta there!” I felt like I was a child again.

**IDA-LEE**

Ms. Guidry asked me to accompany her to the park, so’s she could have her remembrances of her dead husband. I had no idea shw was gonna throw such a fit!

**MRS. DAVID**

I heard that Ida-Lee even chased all the little children out of the fountain — and told them what a reverent place it was.

**PATRICK**

And just as the landlord pulls away from the curb, here comes the air conditioner guy. And honey, he is drop-dead gorgeous!

**JENNY**

In fact Ms. Guidry chased every single solitary child out of that fountain and clean out of the park — scared ‘em so bad I don’t think they’ll ever go back!

**IDA-LEE**

“This here is a sacred place!” Ms. Guidry kept screamin’ “It memorializes my dead husband here! This ain’t no G.D. swimmin’ hole!”

**MRS. DAVID**

People act so strange in the heat of summer.

**PATRICK**

Well, I’m thinkin’ I can’t let him just leave, ‘cause now mt air conditioner is fixed, I’ve got to figure out a way to get him into my lair. Girl, not my “snare” my “lair.” My apartment!

**JENNY**

It had to be the heat.

**IDA-LEE**

It was the heat. I stopped by the church on my way home, to ask His forgiveness for raising my voice to Ms. David.

**MRS. DAVID**

And I can’t make sweet tea like Ida-Lee.

**PATRICK**

But I can’t lie — oh, Girl, he had the sweetest, ruggedly handsome face — and I’m thinking, “This could be him, this could be the real live, honest-to-goodness HIM! And I can’t start everything off with a lie.” I mean a relationship can’t start that way, you know?

**JENNY**

But Ms. Guidry hired me, too. She said I was pretty — like my mama.

**IDA-LEE**

And I said a little prayer for the horses that pull the carriages.

**JENNY**

And she said I was well mannered and that made mama real proud.

**MRS. DAVID**

I either add too much sugar or too much mint.

**PATRICK**

So, I tell him what’s up, and how I’m sorry to have troubled him, and that I’d like to buy him a beer or something, ‘cause there’s this really nice little bar right there — through the park.. No, it’s not a gay bar, Girl!

**IDA-LEE**

And I even said a prayer for the carriage drivers, to help them get our history right.

**MRS. DAVID**

Ida-Lee took her secret sweet-tea recipe with her.

**PATRICK**

And at first he said no, then, we hear this commotion in the park — there's this absolutely wild woman running all around the fountain. Screaming at all the kids to get out and we're both just — "God, look at her!" And her maid was helping her! It was too funny! And we're standing there, laughing and then he says, "yes, let's get that beer." Girl, I thought my heart would stop!

**IDA-LEE**

And I said a prayer for Mrs. David, too — and decided I better tell her about the bourbon, so her first Tuesday of the month "Ladies Day" will be okay.

**MRS. DAVID**

Cuthbert says we'll all just absolutely parish without Miss Ida-Lee; but he always was prone to exaggeration — especially when it's hot. And that's how it happened.

**PATRICK**

And I bought him a beer and we laughed about that crazy lady, and he bought me a beer — and I'm thinking, "Thank God for crazy ladies in the park!" And, when we're headed back to my apartment, that fountain was full of kids again. Yes, I said we went back to my apartment! Oh, Girl let me tell you, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to that lady and her maid! That air conditioner guy...

**IDA-LEE**

That's the whole story — with nothin' left out.

**JENNY**

Ain't that something?

**ALL**

*(Spoken together.)*

It was so hot.

*(They each sigh. Jenny mops her brow, Ida-Lee fans herself, Patrick grins impishly, and Mrs. David closes her umbrella. Lights fade to blackout.)*