# I Have the Time

A 10-Minute play

By

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Version 11.17.19

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## Characters:

Major characters are indicated with boldface.

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| --- | --- |
| **Tom Lockwood:** First as an assistant professor, later as an associate professor | Della’s Friend: Middle-aged woman |
| **Julia:** An undergraduate student | Anne: Middle-aged woman |
| **Della Whittaker:** A vivacious middle-aged woman | Sam, the bartender: Young man |
| Conference Chair: A middle-aged man | Nadine (offstage voice): Young woman |
| Prostitute: Young woman | Lockwood’s daughter (offstage voice): Young woman |

## Suggested casting:

Conference Chair/**Associate Professor Lockwood**

**Assistant Professor Lockwood**/Sam the bartender

**Della Whittaker** (1937–1983)/Anne

Della’s Friend/Nadine/Prostitute/Lockwood’s daughter/**Julia**

# Scene 1

(Lights.)

(The CONFERENCE CHAIR has just stepped up to the podium at the Luncheon Banquet of the annual conference of the Association of Technical Writers. DELLA WHITTAKER is standing a nearby, ready to step up. In the audience are her FRIEND and ASSISTANT PROFESSOR TOM LOCKWOOD. They happen to be seated next to each other.)

CONFERENCE CHAIR: Well, folks, aren’t we having a great conference!

(Gestures for applause, which he receives.)

CONFERENCE CHAIR: The St. Louis Chapter should be very proud. They worked hard to host the 53rd ATW Conference, and all that work surely paid off. I know we’re all eager for the afternoon sessions, but we have one more item on our Lunchtime Banquet agenda. Della Whittaker is going to give us a preview of next year’s conference, in . . . Pittsburgh! Many of you know Della. She’s a Past President of ATW, she’s the current President of the Pittsburgh Chapter, and she heads up ATW’s National Scholarship Program. Let’s welcome Della to the podium.

(Gestures for applause, which he receives. DELLA enters and mounts the podium. DELLA and the CONFERENCE CHAIR hug slightly, the CONFERENCE CHAIR exits, and DELLA, brimming with enthusiasm, faces the audience to begin speaking.)

DELLA: We have a truly outstanding conference in store for you in Pittsburgh, next September 4th through 7th. The weather should be good, and we will be right downtown in the Radisson. You may not know this, but Downtown Pittsburgh has become an exciting place with innovative restaurants and great shopping. I can’t announce the keynote speaker yet, because the arrangements have not been quite finalized. But we’re talking to a true luminary in the field of technical writing, someone who will be of great interest to both industry folks and academics. Of course, we have really fun social events planned for each evening, including a Pirates night game against the San Francisco Giants.

(DELLA’S voice fades, and she continues in pantomime. LOCKWOOD notices that DELLA’S FRIEND wears a look of terrible agony, and she is struggling not to cry openly.)

LOCKWOOD: Are you OK? Are you ill?

DELLA’S FRIEND: I’m not ill. Please, just hold my hand.

(She turns toward LOCKWOOD and places both of her hands in his.)

DELLA’S FRIEND: Della’s is dying of cancer. She knows she’ll never see next year’s conference. I’m sorry. I just needed to *tell* someone.

LOCKWOOD: Oh, God. Yes, I understand.

DELLA: (At full volume.) So, see you all in Pittsburgh!

(There is applause. DELLA’S FRIEND and LOCKWOOD applaud mechanically, but he is looking intently into the eyes of DELLA’S FRIEND as she tries to keep her composure. Then, along with the rest of the audience, they stand and move into the aisle to leave the hall.)

DELLA’S FRIEND: How can she do that? How can anyone be that strong?

LOCKWOOD: I don’t know. I am so sad. I don’t know what else to say.

(DELLA’S FRIEND and LOCKWOOD begin to part ways with a final, meaningful glance.)

LOCKWOOD: I am so sorry. This is such a tragedy.

(DELLA sees LOCKWOOD and calls to him.)

DELLA: Professor Lockwood. Tom.

LOCKWOOD: (Stammering.) Hello, Della . . . You gave a great conference preview.

DELLA: Thank you. Tom, I need to talk to you about something. You’ve done a great job with the Scholarship Program for the Twin Cities chapter. Everyone recognizes that. Tom, I’m asking you to take over for me at the national level.

LOCKWOOD: Della, I’m sorry, but that’s really not possible. I am already . . .

DELLA: Tom, I know how much you do, and I hate to ask. But, Tom, I *need* to replace myself in some of my ATW roles. I have really pressing reasons. Please. I have to keep going with next year’s conference, but I need to get some other things in order.

LOCKWOOD: OK. OK. I’ll do it.

DELLA: Thank you so much. I’m breathing easier now. I’ll send you some materials, and we can talk on the phone. I’ll walk you through everything.

LOCKWOOD: OK, Della.

DELLA: Thanks, Tom. Catch you later.

LOCKWOOD: Good bye, Della.

(They exit.)

(Blackout.)

## Scene 2

(Lights.)

(Now LOCKWOOD is lounging, a bit disheveled, in a chair in his hotel room. He is talking on the phone with his wife, NADINE, who is very angry.)

NADINE: What?! We talked about this before you left. You *promised.* No more extra work. No new commitments. Tom, *all* you *care* about is your career. One more item on your vita. I don’t count. The kids don’t count. Your life at home doesn’t count. Just your job, just your career. I’ve had it with you, Tom. I’ve had it! Take *ten* more jobs at the conference. I’ll make sure you have lots of time for everything.

LOCKWOOD: Nadine. Please, you don’t understand. This had nothing to do with my career. It was something else entirely. Please, just let me explain.

NADINE: Don’t tell me anything! All I know is that you promised me that your family would start getting a little of your attention.

LOCKWOOD: Please, Nadine. Just listen to me.

NADINE: There’s nothing I want to hear from you. Good . . . Bye!

(NADINE hangs up. LOCKWOOD is overwhelmed with emotion.)

 (Blackout.)

## Scene 3

(Lights.)

(LOCKWOOD re-appears at a small table in the hotel bar. There are two drinks on the table. A young woman with a provocative walk approaches Tom.)

PROSTITUTE: Hi, honey. You must be the most unhappy man in this entire hotel. Are you with one of the conferences?

LOCKWOOD: (Not quite looking up.) Yes, the technical writing conference.

PROSTITUTE: Well, I’m sorry the conference is going so badly for you.

LOCKWOOD: (Looking more closely at her.) It’s not the conference. It’s trouble at home. My wife.

PROSTITUTE: Oh, *that* kind of trouble. I’m really good with that kind of trouble.

(She sits down next to him.)

PROSTITUTE: Believe me, I am really good.

 (Blackout.)

## Scene 4

(Lights.)

(Fifteen years later, PROFESSOR LOCKWOOD, tired and morose, is finishing off his second drink at a bar in the city where he lives. LOCKWOOD’S briefcase is on the floor by his bar stool. Even the briefcase looks old and tired.)

BARTENDER: Hey, Professor, you want another one?

LOCKWOOD: Yeah, Sam. I’ll have one more.

(LOCKWOOD’S cell phone rings. He answers it. SAM brings LOCKWOOD his cocktail and slips off stage.)

LOCKWOOD: Hello.

(ANNE can be seen at the periphery of the stage talking on the phone. LOCKWOOD is drinking down his cocktail during the phone call.)

ANNE: Hello, Tom. This is Anne Grayson, from the ATW National Office in DC. Is this a good time to talk?

LOCKWOOD: Sure, Anne. It’s OK.

ANNE: I’m calling to check in with you regarding the Scholarship Committee. Everyone here at the National Office is so grateful that you’ve served as Scholarship Chair all these years. You’ve truly done an outstanding job. I’m calling to confirm that I can set you down for another three-year term.

LOCKWOOD: Yes, Anne. You can.

ANNE: That’s great Tom. I am so pleased. One more thing. The Leadership has a new initiative. We want to expand the scholarship program to the international level. For example, India. That’s a huge growth area for us. There are a lot of high tech companies in India, and other countries, ready to support a technical writing scholarship program in their country. We know you can make this a success, but it *will* entail extra work, so I wanted you to know about the new initiative before you committed to another term.

LOCKWOOD: Yes, it’s OK, Anne. I have the time.

ANNE: I am so pleased. Thank you Professor Lockwood! You contribute so much to ATW.

LOCKWOOD: OK, Anne. Send me whatever materials you have. Good bye.

(LOCKWOOD ends the call. Then he checks his phone messages, finds one, and plays it. The voice of LOCKWOOD’s DAUGHTER is heard from off-stage.)

LOCKWOOD’S DAUGHTER: Hello Dad. I just got the birthday present you sent me. The sweater is really nice. Thank you. Sorry, we didn’t get to talk. I’ll call you on Sunday. Love you, Dad.

(LOCKWOOD puts down the phone.)

 (Blackout.)

## Scene 5

(Lights.)

(LOCKWOOD is at his desk in his faculty office, grading a large stack of student papers. There is a knock on the (imaginary) partly open door.)

LOCKWOOD: Come in.

(JULIA, one of LOCKWOOD’S students, enters.)

LOCKWOOD: Good to see you, Julia. Take a seat.

JULIA: Professor Lockwood. I’ve had very good news. I think I’ve worked out my financial aid for next year. I was really worried about it. But now I’ll be able to finish my degree.

LOCKWOOD: That’s great Julia. I’m so pleased.

JULIA: I just found out that I’m getting a $5000 tuition waiver from the College, and I was chosen for next year’s Whittaker Scholarship. That’s $2000. That money, along with my student loan, will be enough.

LOCKWOOD: Wonderful, Julia. You *are* an excellent student.

JULIA: (Hesitantly.) Professor Lockwood, I know you’re very involved with the ATW and the Whittaker Scholarships. Did you help me get the scholarship?

LOCKWOOD: No, not at all, Julia. I raise money for the scholarship endowment fund. The applications are reviewed by a completely different group of people.

JULIA: Well, however it happened, I’m very grateful to ATW.

LOCKWOOD: That’s great Julia. You’re just the kind of student the Della Whittaker Scholarship is intended for. I know that Della would be pleased that you’ve been chosen. Julia . . .

(LOCKWOOD seems to struggle as he speaks.)

JULIA: Yes, Professor Lockwood.

LOCKWOOD: Julia, you’re going to get an official notification. Perhaps you already got it. It will say a thing or two about Della Whittaker . . .

(LOCKWOOD begins to get more emotional.)

LOCKWOOD: I just. . . I just want to say a few things about Della that they can’t put in a notification. She . . . was a very special person, Julia. She died relatively young. She died . . .

(LOCKWOOD becomes still more emotional. He begins to lose control.)

LOCKWOOD: She was just a . . . *very* special person. I guess that’s all I have to say.

JULIA: Thank you for telling me that, Professor Lockwood. I’ll remember what you’ve said. Professor, are you OK?

LOCKWOOD: Yes, Julia. I’m OK. It’s just that hearing your news brought back some old memories. That’s all.

JULIA: I understand. Were you and Della Whittaker close? I mean . . .

LOCKWOOD: No, Julia. We weren’t really close. We only met a few times. But . . . I guess you could say she had a big impact on my life.

JULIA: Oh. OK. I get it. Are you *sure* you’re OK?

(LOCKWOOD recovers himself.)

LOCKWOOD: I’m fine, Julia. I just started thinking about some things. Congratulations on the scholarship, on *both* of them. This is really great news.

(JULIA stands and heads toward the door.)

JULIA: Thank you, Professor Lockwood. See you in class on Monday.

LOCKWOOD: (Distantly.) Yes, Julia.

(LOCKWOOD looks off into space and then out at the audience. He picks up an imaginary student paper from a pile of papers and examines it closely.)

LOCKWOOD: Let’s see now, “Tom” . . . “Lockwood.” Tom, you never seem to graduate. Here you are one damn semester after another. And I can’t say your grades are anything to be proud of. Let’s take a look.

(Lifts his head to review some kind of imaginary transcript or report card.)

“Practicum in Life Satisfaction.” Tom, you are failing. You are a lonely, unhappy man.

“Control of Alcoholic Tendencies.” Well, that’s a solid B, Tom. No one in the Department thinks of you as anything more than a fellow with a drinking problem. You’ve never shown up *obviously* drunk at a department meeting, and you’re always sober in class. No one knows about the bottle in your briefcase.

“Other Vices.” Hmm, not good, Tom. Not good. You do seem to require occasional female companionship. And not the right kind of female companionship. You might have gotten caught by now, except absolutely no one cares where in the city you go at night. And, you’re too smart to get yourself arrested. Well, that’s worth a half point extra credit.

“Maintaining Relationship with Children.” Well, Tom, you get an A for effort, but we don’t actually give a grade for *effort.* So, let’s see. Your daughter talks to you, and your son does not. Averages to a D, Tom. Sorry. Yes, Nadine gets some of the blame for that. Too bad you can’t give *her* a grade or two.

“Knowing When to Say ‘No.’” F! . . . F! . . . F! . . . Della, Oh, Della. It wasn’t your fault. But, look what you did to me!

“Teaching Effectiveness.” Well, that’s the one grade that pulls up your average, Tom. That and the scholarship money you’ve raised all these years.

“Future Prospects.” Hmm. I don’t see much likelihood of improvement. I think it will be pretty much the same, right up to the end. Graded papers stacked half way to the moon. An army of students and a small army of advisees. Nice kid, that Julia. Oh, wait, all is not grim. With just a little luck they’ll be a Thomas Lockwood Scholarship at ATW after you die. “Hello Della Whittaker Scholarship. I’m the new Thomas Lockwood Scholarship. Pleased to meet you. You must remember Della. She was quite a woman, wasn’t she!”

 (Blackout.)

## THE END