SWEDISH FISH

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Richard Fulco

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SYNOPSIS: In a futuristic world where people must pay in order to speak, a tramp encounters an impoverished woman on a country road and hastily spends all of his money hoping to engage in meaningful conversation with her. Unfortunately, she doesn't have the money that is required to speak, but the couple manages to communicate and entertain themselves, and in the end, words are not necessary for them to form a genuine bond.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(1 MAN, 1 WOMAN)

MAN (m) .....Description is unimportant.

WOMAN (f).....Description is unimportant.

SCENE: A public place.

TIME: The future.

PROPERTIES

- ☐ Wallet
- ☐ Timer/clock
- ☐ Toothbrush
- ☐ Candy bar
- ☐ Needle and thread
- ☐ Handkerchief
- ☐ Dollar bills
- ☐ Telephone book/Address book
- ☐ Pocket watch
- ☐ Rabbit's foot

AT RISE:

A WOMAN sits on a country road. A MAN enters, circles the WOMAN several times and eventually sits next to her. They stare at each other. They gaze at their surroundings. The MAN gestures to the WOMAN. She gestures in return. A series of gestures. He takes out his wallet and places money into a machine. He takes his change and counts it a few times. He retrieves a timer from the machine and places it next to the WOMAN. Finally, after a long pause, the silence is broken.

MAN: Hi. That's not a bad rate. Best I've seen. I've been shopping around for months, and this is surely a bargain. You don't have the money?

She shrugs "no."

MAN: I hate talking to myself. I don't even like the sound of my own voice. There's never a reasonable reply. I wish you could say something.

She nods "me too."

MAN: I haven't spoken to anyone in . . . in a long time. I wish you could say something. A word. A moan, even. I wish you could say something. I wish you could actually say the word "something." Are you positive that you don't have the money?

She nods "yes," then smiles.

MAN: Anyone ever tell you that you have an infectious smile?

She shakes "no."

MAN: I bet you kissed lots of boys too.

She shakes "no."

MAN: They must have come from miles around to see your mouth, your lips slightly curve. You're pretty, too. Anyone ever tell you that?

She shakes "no."

MAN: I bet people told you that your whole life. That's probably what cluttered your mind. One day you woke up and no one was there to tell you how beautiful you were. Am I right?

She nods "something like that."

MAN: You are beautiful. I'll tell you straight to your face. I'm not one of these guys who keeps his emotions under wraps. I explode. I'm like a volcano. You don't believe me, do you?

She shakes "no."

MAN: What do I got to do to prove it? Stand on my head. I can do that. I'll stand on my head and shout to the world, "You're the prettiest thing I ever seen." They'll believe me, all right. I'm persuasive when I want to be.

She nods "I can see that."

MAN: Fifty bucks doesn't go a long way these days. Get you a bottle of water, some deodorant. And a handful of those red candy, Russian Fish.

She shrugs "no."

MAN: Canadian fish? *(She shakes, "no.")* German fish? *(She shakes, "no.")* Italian fish?

She stomps her feet "no." She does a sexy walk across the stage.

MAN: Swedish fish.

She nods, "exactly."

MAN: Yeah, I love that candy. Gets stuck in your teeth. You gotta pull it out sometimes with your fingers. You like it?

She shakes, "no."

MAN: I never thought we'd be paying for something like this. At least walking in the park is still free.

She shakes, "no."

MAN: No? When did they change that?

She gestures "yesterday."

MAN: Yesterday? Everything changes for the worst, I'll tell you. Now you got to watch out for mosquitoes. They bite you and you can die. I used to like getting bit by mosquitoes. I liked scratching the bites. When I was a kid, my best friend told me to make a cross over the bite with my fingernail and that would stop the itch. It never worked. Did you ever catch fireflies and put them in a coffee jar?

She nods "yes."

MAN: Me too. But one time I didn't put holes in the top and the lightning bugs - - we used to call them that.

She nods, "me too."

MAN: You too? Well, they died. But I buried them in my backyard next to my frog, fish, turtle, puppy, canary and my cat, Jupiter. Jupiter was a son of a gun. Hissing and biting all the time. I felt guilty when he died 'cause I never liked him. Have you ever felt guilty before?

She quivers, "yes."

MAN: The absolute worst feeling in the world. There's nothing you can do about it. It just sits there in the pit of your belly and every now and then it taps on your insides and reminds you of what you have done. I haven't spoken to a woman since my ex-wife left this world. If I had the money, I would pay for you. You don't have any money?

She reaches into her pockets and pulls out a toothbrush, a half-eaten candy bar, needle and thread, a handkerchief, and a dollar.

MAN: A toothbrush, a half-eaten candy bar, a needle and some thread, a handkerchief and a dollar. Well, that's a start. Let's see what I got.

He reaches into his pockets and pulls out some dollar bills, some change, a telephone/address book, a pocket watch, a rabbit's foot and a novel. He shakes his wallet but nothing comes out. He turns it upside down and peers into it.

MAN: I got a couple of bucks and some change, my telephone book and a copy of *Oliver Twist*. I love this story. Have you read it?

She shrugs, "no."

MAN: I read it about . . . so many times . . . about . . . let's see . . . *(He counts on all his fingers.)* . . . twice. You want to read it?

She nods, "okay."

MAN: Here, be my guest. You'll love the part when Oliver meets Fagin. Fagin is a genius, I tell you. Evil but smart. He leads the whole troop of boys. He teaches them how to pickpocket. Of course, he takes a percentage. That's what makes him a genius.

He hands her the book.

MAN: Well, enjoy it. Now, let's see how much money I got. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen dollars and . . . *(He counts the change.)* fifty-six cents. And you got a dollar, so that makes . . . *(He counts on all his fingers.)* fourteen dollars and fifty-six cents. We're not even close. Now what would Fagin do if he were in our situation?

She points to his pockets and then pulls the wallet from his back pocket.

MAN: That's it, you're a genius. We'll pick the pocket of the next person who comes by. We need a plan. Now, what will we do? Let's see.

She does a series of flirtatious things: a wave, a batting of the eye, a lift of her skirt.

MAN: Good, you'll distract them, and I'll reach into their back pocket and take their wallet. This is brilliant. You are brilliant. Beautiful and brilliant. What a team we make. *(He looks at the timer.)* But I'm running out of time. Do you see anyone?

They look around. She shakes, "no."

MAN: No one? This is a popular spot. Here, you can see the sun rise and set for only a few bucks. *(He counts his money)* We have enough for sunset. Last week I snuck in and got to see it for free. It was orangey. I had never seen it so bright in all my life. Not that I'm old or anything, but . . . .oh my! My safety money. I forgot about my security fund. *(He takes off his shoe and searches for the money. He finds it, then hands it to her.)* I hope you don't mind lint. Quick, go and feed the machine . . .

The WOMAN places money in the machine. She retrieves the timer. She moves her mouth, grimaces. She opens her mouth and tries to speak, but nothing comes out. She tries again. Same. She goes to the machine and kicks it a few times. Finally, she opens her mouth and speaks . . .

WOMAN: This feels weird.
MAN: Now we can have a fruitful exchange of words, ideas and . . .

The timer sounds. His speaking comes to an abrupt halt.

WOMAN: Oh no! This is just my luck.

He nods, "his luck too."

WOMAN: I hope you listen as well as you speak.

He gestures "sometimes."

WOMAN: I haven't uttered a word in . . . in a long time. Since the water shortage. I think. That was dreadful. Fortunately, my family owned some wells in the western/southern zone. You remember that? It was . . . a long . . . a long time ago.

He nods, "yes."

WOMAN: So many families were separated. People fell by the tons. I don't handle sorrow very well. I guess it's one of my weaknesses. I think unimaginable things. Horrific thoughts cloud my mind. It's a dreadful feeling. Like losing a coin in the ocean. Do you like to swim?

He does the breaststroke and nods, "sometimes."

WOMAN: I spent most of my time in the water when the disease broke out. Swam for days. Swam out to a little island. I would get lonely at times, so I would swim back, but the pestilence spread. You're not from the western/southern zone, are you?

He shakes his head "no," then points upward.

WOMAN: Oh you're from the eastern/northern sphere. I never spoke to anyone from those parts. I feel so guilty. I think my intestines are going to burst. I haven't felt this way since the time I pushed my sister into moving traffic. Fortunately, she only suffered a broken leg, a broken clavicle, several abrasions, a minor concussion and a sprained knee and wrist. I did her chores for an entire year. I gave her my allowance, too. I let her hang out with me and my friends. I even taught her to dance. We became best friends. Do you have a sister?

He shakes, "no."

WOMAN: My sister was lost during the invasion. My family searched, I searched, the police searched, the soldiers searched . . . .I hope she didn't feel any pain. There is nothing worse than a long agonizing suffering. My teeth hurt.

He places his thumb underneath his front teeth.

WOMAN: I can't believe you're from the eastern/northern sphere. My zone never did anything to help your people. There aren't many of you left. I love the sound of your voice. It is so operatic. Were you ever a singer?

He nods, "yes."

WOMAN: Sing something.

He points to his throat and the machine.

WOMAN: I wish you had used the money. I loved the things you said to me. I haven't been called beautiful in . . . in a long time. And no one ever called me brilliant before. Sometimes we speak too much and don't say enough. Maybe we should watch the seagulls quietly together.

He nods, "Speak!"

WOMAN: We don't need words. Let's listen to the seagulls sing. Listen.

He gestures, "Speak!"

WOMAN: Will you hold me?

He nods, "yes."

WOMAN: Look at the birds perched in unison. They all look in the same direction. What are they looking at? Look. Do you think seagulls ever feel guilty?

They hold one another and look at the seagulls. Lights fade slowly to black.

THE END