

***DUCK and COVER***

a full-length comic drama  
by Michael Kimball

CAST REQUIREMENTS

one women, four men, and one 12-yr-old boy

PO Box 356  
Cape Neddick  
Maine 03902

## Cast of Characters

CLAIRE WHITEBOTTOM, F. 38	Housewife and Mom. Claire wears dresses. Always. She loves her home and family, but lately she's been feeling claustrophobic.
HUGH WHITEBOTTOM, M. 40	WWII submarine veteran, shoe store manager, suburban home owner; a loving yet regimented and overprotective husband and father.
STEVE WHITEBOTTOM, M. 12	Their son, of slight stature, Science Fair champ. He wears glasses, button-down shirts and chinos. And brown leather Poll Parrot shoes.
BUNNY, M. 36	Claire's younger brother. A gifted, eccentric jazz trumpet player. A lifelong nonconformist, he could give a damn who doesn't like him. Bunny and Claire share an intuitive, playful relationship, but Bunny is also aloof, these days more than ever, and he avoids physical and emotional contact.
EDDIE SAVAGE, M. 37	Bunny's accompanist and long-term partner. Also closeted--and Black--just trying to get along in 1962 New England.
MR. RIPPIT, M. 42	The whistling milkman. He wears a uniform. A holdover from the town's rural days, Mr. Rippit has never moved off the family farm. Now that his career is quickly becoming obsolete, he supplements his income by providing housewives with black-market pharmaceuticals.

## Scene

The Whitebottom home, suburban working class Massachusetts

## Time

October 1962

## ACT ONE

The Whitebottom living room and kitchen alcove. It's 1962. Auburn, Massachusetts, a working-class suburb of Worcester, an industrial center. The house is modest, spotless, and rigidly symmetrical.

The living Room occupies a large area and contains a sofa and easy chair facing a television--or suggested television. A hassock serves as a footrest for the easy chair. Everything matches, everything is parallel and perpendicular. A door off the living room leads outside. Windows are covered with Venetian blinds that stay drawn.

The kitchen alcove is located separately, containing a table and 3 chairs, and an electric hot-water kettle. A radio sits on a Formica table, flanked by jars of Necafe and Coffee-Mate and a sugar bowl. A door off the alcove leads to the o.s. kitchen, bedrooms, etc.

OPEN ON:

**1962 TV FAMILY DRAMA MUSIC.** *In the living room, HUGH peeks out the Venetian blinds. CLAIRE happily folds laundry. They both have coffee cups and saucers.*

*In the adjoining kitchen alcove, STEVE sits at the table tying a knot.*

HUGH

Waterloo.

STEVE

Battle of Waterloo. Eighteen-fifteen, Belgium.  
Wellington defeats Napoleon. Done.

*Steve slaps the knot on the table.*

HUGH

Milkman.

CLAIRE

Must be ten forty-five. You could set your watch by that man.

*Hugh joins Steve at the table, inspects the knot.*

HUGH

Slipknot. Battle of Hastings.

*As Steve ties a clove hitch.*

STEVE

Battle of Hastings. Ten-sixty-six, England. William of Normandy defeats King Harold the Saxon. Slipknot.  
Done.

HUGH

Good. Yorktown. Square knot.

STEVE

Battle of Yorktown. Seventeen. . .

HUGH  
Yorktown.

STEVE  
--eighty-one! Virginia! General George Washington  
and French General Rochambeau defeat Cornwallis.

HUGH  
Rocham-who?

STEVE  
George Washington defeats Cornwallis. And-- square  
knot!

HUGH  
Wiseneimer.

*Hugh inspects the knot.*

HUGH (CONT'D)  
(shakes Steve's hand)  
I'm proud of you, Steve.

STEVE  
Thanks, Dad.

HUGH  
Good firm grip. Says a lot about a man.

*They hear the MILKMAN WHISTLING--inside the house.*

MR. RIPPIT (O.S.)  
Anybody home?

*Hugh CLICKS OFF RADIO. MOOD MUSIC STOPS.*

HUGH  
Who left the back door unlocked?

CLAIRE  
Ohh.  
(calling)  
Come on in, Mr. Rippit. When I brought the laundry  
in, I must've--

*Mr. Rippit enters from an o.s. back door with a milk carrier and two quarts of milk.*

MR. RIPPIT  
The door was open. I'll just stick 'em in the fridge for  
you.

HUGH  
How y'doin', Jack?

MR. RIPPIT

Oh, fine, fine, little sluggish. How's the shoe store, Mr. Whitebottom?

HUGH

Excellent.

MR. RIPPIT

Surprised to find you inside. Beautiful Saturday morning, I figured you'd be out tossin' a football.

HUGH

Oh, Steve's not much for sports.

MR. RIPPIT

I'll bet you were quite an athlete, though, weren't you, Mr. Whitebottom?

HUGH

All the men in my family were. Football, baseball, hockey.

*(rubbing Steve's head)*

We got lucky, I guess. God gave one of us brains for a change.

STEVE

Just practicing my knots and battles, Mr. Rippit.

MR. RIPPIT

Terrific. You know, they say it's hard to tell Nescafe from freshly brewed?

STEVE

Try to stump me.

MR. RIPPIT

Oh, gee, I don't know my knots like I should. Navy man like your Dad, I bet he could tie 'em in his sleep.

*(Steve laughs.)*

Submarine duty. You must've seen some action.

CLAIRE

*(deflecting)*

Stevie, show Mr. Rippit what you can do.

STEVE

Okay. Figure-eight knot. Name a battle.

MR. RIPPIT

Okay, well . . . How about the Battle of Pearl Harbor.

STEVE

Trick question. That wasn't a battle. It was an ambush.

CLAIRE

Stevie just started in seventh grade. Imagine? Junior high school.

MR. RIPPIT

You don't say.

HUGH

He's young for his age.

STEVE

I'll be going to college after high school. I've decided to become an electrical engineer.

HUGH

Keep up your grades, Son, clean your plate, and one day you could be President of the United States.

CLAIRE

They grow so fast, don't they?

MR. RIPPIT

You can say that again.

CLAIRE

How's Jack Junior, Mr. Rippit?

MR. RIPPIT

Jackie? Oh, fine, fine. He joined ROTC, so we're all very proud of him. These days you never know. This business with Russia? Krushchev?

HUGH

Empties are in the box where we like to take the milk. On the porch, as usual.

MR. RIPPIT

Any cottage cheese today, Mrs. Whitebottom?

HUGH

I think not.

CLAIRE

Oh. Maybe some heavy cream for whipping.

STEVE

Neato! What's for dessert? Chocolate cream pie?

CLAIRE

With ripe apples on our tree?

HUGH

After you mow the lawn, how about we get the stepladder out and pick a few?

STEVE

You bet, Dad! And I'll be sure to get those corners this time.

HUGH

I know you will, son.

MR. RIPPIT

*(to Claire)*

He's college material, alright.

STEVE

I bet I could mow faster if I had a pair of sneakers.

HUGH

Nice try, Nixon.

CLAIRE

I understand all the boys are wearing sneakers these days.

HUGH

Not all of 'em.

CLAIRE

The shoe store had a rough September.

HUGH

We had a fine September.

CLAIRE

So many boys are wearing sneakers these days.

HUGH

A few broken ankles, they'll fall by the wayside.

CLAIRE

Oh, Hugh.

HUGH

I mean the sneakers.

MR. RIPPIT

I'm sure you're right. Then again, I understand they help a boy jump twenty percent higher.

HUGH

Good ol' leg muscles, that's what you need, right, son? And a sturdy leather shoe with a snug fit. Take it from me: Poll Parrot Shoes will never sell sneakers.

MR. RIPPIT

Listen to your Dad, Steve, he's the expert. Well, I'd better get a move on, today being my long day. Awful nice to see you, folks.

CLAIRE

I'll go out with you, Mr. Rippit, so you don't have to make a special trip for the cream.

HUGH

I'll get it.

CLAIRE

I'm perfectly capable.

STEVE

I'll do it, I don't mind!

*Steve runs off ahead of Mr. Rippit. They exit.*

MR. RIPPIT

Thank you, Stevie.

STEVE

You're welcome, Mr. Rippit.

HUGH

Don't dawdle.

MR. RIPPIT (O.S.)

*(diminishing)*

That's one good-lookin' pair of shoes, Stevie.

*Hugh watches through the blinds.*

HUGH

Since when do you talk to strangers about my livelihood?

CLAIRE

It's only the milkman.

HUGH

--which means it's none of his business.

*Steve returns with a pint of cream and a half-pint of chocolate milk.*

STEVE

Look what Mr. Rippit gave me.

HUGH

Lemme have a look.

*Steve tosses the chocolate milk to Hugh, who looks it over. Hugh tosses the chocolate milk back to Steve. Steve bobbles the carton, drops it on the floor.*

HUGH (CONT'D)

Nice try, Chief.

STEVE

*(excited)*

Dad, what about Russia? Are we going to war?

HUGH

Sit down, Son. I want to tell you something.

(MORE)

HUGH (CONT'D)

About Mr. Rippit.  
(pointedly)  
Man-to-man.

*Claire exits to kitchen. Hugh and Steve sit.*

HUGH (CONT'D)

When the rest of us were overseas fighting the Japs--  
and Mussolini, and Hitler--Mr. Rippit stayed home  
delivering milk.

STEVE

I know.

HUGH

He was Four-F.

STEVE

Four-F's?

HUGH

Mental, Steve.

STEVE

I don't get it.

HUGH

Son?

STEVE

Uh-huh?

HUGH

Mr. Rippit's insane.

STEVE

Jeezum. Like "Psycho?"

HUGH

Steve?

STEVE

Yeah, Dad?

HUGH

God. Country. Family.

STEVE

Uh-huh.

HUGH

God. Country. Then family. Did you leave the back  
door unlocked? Maybe after you brought the rubbish  
out?

*Claire stands in the doorway, watching.*

HUGH (CONT'D)

You wouldn't tell a lie to protect Mom, would you, son?

CLAIRE

Oh, Hugh. I'm sure it was me.

HUGH

I'm talking. Steve?

STEVE

Well, yeah. I think I did. I mean, no, I wouldn't lie, and yeah. I think I left the door unlocked.

HUGH

*(lovingly)*  
You think?

STEVE

I know. I left it unlocked.

HUGH

Honesty is the best policy. But carelessness can sink a battleship. Remember that, Steve.

STEVE

I'll be more careful, Dad.

HUGH

That's what keeps us safe and secure, Steve. A tight house.

STEVE

I'll do my best.

HUGH

And--?

STEVE

Um. . .

HUGH

Father of our country.

STEVE

George Wash-- Never tell a lie!

HUGH

'Atta boy!

STEVE

'Cause God hates liars.

CLAIRE  
God doesn't hate, really.

HUGH  
But he does send liars to-- you-know-where.

STEVE  
H-E--

HUGH  
That's enough.

STEVE  
Anyway, I hope God hurries up and sends me a brother.

HUGH  
God doesn't hurry for anybody.

*Claire moves to the window, peeks out the blinds.*

STEVE  
I keep praying.

HUGH  
Me too. And Mom. Right, honey?

CLAIRE  
It's a taxicab.

HUGH  
In Auburn?

STEVE  
On our road?

*He runs to the window.*

HUGH  
Stay back.

*Hugh sidles up to the window, peers out.*

CLAIRE  
What's it doing?

HUGH  
Somebody's gettin' out. Goin' up to the Barker house.

STEVE  
Who?

CLAIRE  
Do you recognize him?

HUGH  
Some kind of hobo. Wait--  
(*play by play*)  
Barker opens the door, they're talkin'. They're talkin'.  
They're--

STEVE  
What's the matter?

HUGH  
Biggie Barker just pointed this way.

STEVE  
Here?

CLAIRE  
(*to Steve*)  
It's okay.

HUGH  
(*very calmly*)  
The hobo gets back in the taxi. Here they come . . .  
Here they come. . .

STEVE  
Mom?

HUGH  
And there they go.  
(*beat*)  
See? Nothing to worry about, Steve. Just a taxicab.

CLAIRE  
I think that's the first taxicab I've ever seen in Auburn.

HUGH  
Not me.

STEVE  
Really?

HUGH  
About a month back.

*A SINGLE SHARP KNOCK at the front door. Claire cries out. They all take action as trained. Claire goes to the phone, ready to dial. Steve goes to his bedroom and shuts the door. ANOTHER SINGLE KNOCK.*

CLAIRE  
That's not Mr. Rippit's knock.

HUGH  
That's not a knock.

*ANOTHER KNOCK.*

STEVE

I don't like that knock.

*ANOTHER KNOCK.*

CLAIRE

It sounds import--

*Someone tries to open the door.*

HUGH

*(command voice)*

Who's there?

BUNNY (O.S.)

Me!

CLAIRE

*(to herself)*

Bunny?

HUGH

*(whisper)*

Oh shit.

*(to Claire)*

Sorry, Hon.

*Claire opens the door. Bunny limps in, wearing scorched pajamas, carrying a blackened trumpet and the Worcester Telegram & Gazette. One hand is bandaged.*

CLAIRE

Bunny!

STEVE

Uncle Bunny?

*Claire moves to hug him, but Bunny deflects her attempt.*

BUNNY

Why would someone live in a place where all the houses look alike?

CLAIRE

What in the-- Bunny, what happened--

HUGH

*(to Steve)*

What the hell is he doin' here?

BUNNY

*(obviously)*

My bedroom caught on fire! What does it look like?

CLAIRE

Oh, my gosh! Bunny! Are you okay?

BUNNY

*(deflecting a hug)*

Fast asleep. Next thing you know, smoke, goddamn flames shootin' out of the bureau drawers--

HUGH

Let's watch the language.

CLAIRE

Oh, Bunny! Smoking in bed?

BUNNY

My socks, t-shirts, underpants-- my hat.

CLAIRE

*(panicking)*

Stevie, go get Uncle Bunny some water!

*Steve races out of the room.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Oh, Bunny, look at you! How did you get out?

BUNNY

Window. How do you think I got out? Jumped. Crashed right through the glass!

CLAIRE

From the second floor?

*Stevie returns, gives Bunny the water.*

STEVE

Second floor? Holy smokes! Didn't you get hurt?

BUNNY

Of course I got hurt. My goddamn back was on fire.

HUGH

Watch the language.

BUNNY

Luckily, I landed on my feet.

*Bunny spots the easy and moves to sit down--*

HUGH

Probably shouldn't sit on the--

*Bunny sits.*

STEVE

Wow. The whole house smells like barbecue.

CLAIRE

Bunny, would you like to take a shower?

BUNNY

Already did. They gave me a sponge bath at the hospital.

CLAIRE

Maybe just throw your PJ's in the wash.

BUNNY

Got a bathrobe I can borrow?

HUGH

*(to Claire)*

What are his plans?

BUNNY

I lost everything. Clothes, record player, records--

CLAIRE

Oh, Bunny, your records?

BUNNY

Lucky I grabbed this.

*(trumpet)*

Red-hot. Fried my stinkin' hand.

CLAIRE

What are you gonna do, Bunny?

HUGH

*(to Steve)*

Here we go.

BUNNY

Stay here till I get back on my feet--?

CLAIRE

Uh-huh.

STEVE

You can sleep in my room, Uncle Bunny.

*(to Claire)*

I'll sleep on the foldaway cot.

HUGH

Probably not a good idea.

BUNNY

Got a sandwich?

CLAIRE

Oh. Sure. What kind?

BUNNY

Salami and Swiss. Little mustard. Pickle, if you got it.

HUGH  
No salami. No Swiss.

BUNNY  
Baloney's good.

HUGH  
We don't buy Italian food.

CLAIRE  
How about some nice Spam and Velveeta?

BUNNY  
What's that?

HUGH  
It's a free sandwich.

CLAIRE  
Hugh, can you help me in the kitchen, please?

BUNNY  
Got a beer?

HUGH  
Steve? On the double.

STEVE  
Aye-Aye!

*Steve, Claire, and Hugh exit to the kitchen, where we hear BUSY MURMURING. Bunny wipes his charred trumpet with his pajama sleeve.*

BUNNY  
(calling)  
Anyone got a rag?

*Bunny gets up, wanders into the kitchen. The MURMURING STOPS. Hugh and Claire enter the alcove.*

CLAIRE  
We are not putting him out in the freezing cold.

HUGH  
It's October! He's been back in the country three weeks,  
and he burns down an apartment building.

CLAIRE  
(calling)  
Bunny, your sandwich is on the counter.  
(to Hugh)  
He's my brother, Hugh. I've seen him twice in thirteen  
years.

HUGH  
--which is two times too many.

STEVE

*(entering)*

I'll sleep on the cot, I don't mind.

HUGH

This doesn't concern you.

*Bunny enters, eating his sandwich.*

BUNNY

*(mouth full of food)*

I can't sleep on a cot. Break my back. What the hell is this?

CLAIRE

Spam. It's sandwich spread.

BUNNY

"Sandwich spread." It's got the consistency of crap. Good, though.

HUGH

Can we watch the language?

CLAIRE

"Tastes like crap. Good, though." Remember Pop used to say that all the time?

STEVE

Mom!

HUGH

I've come to a decision. End of November. That'll give him time to find a new apartment.

CLAIRE

Bunny! You'll be here for Thanksgiving.

HUGH

We'll charge a fair rent: ten dollars a week. Fair and firm.

BUNNY

I lost everything.

HUGH

You're gonna have to face facts. Find a job.

BUNNY

I've got a job.

HUGH

A real job.

BUNNY

I get paid to play music. That's a job.

STEVE

You get paid to play?

HUGH

Steven? Adults are talking.

BUNNY

Yeah, I got two jobs today. A wedding this afternoon and a gig tonight at The Magic Cellar.

STEVE

You play music in a cellar?

HUGH

I've still got the floor. Rule Number One:

BUNNY

The Magic Cellar. It's a club.

HUGH

There'll be no smoking in Steve's bedroom.

STEVE

How come it's magic?

HUGH

Rule Number Two: No drinking.

BUNNY

In his room?

HUGH

In the house, the yard, on the road, anywhere. As long as you're sleeping under my roof, you're on the wagon.

BUNNY

Gee. Thanks for lookin' out for me.

HUGH

You're not doin' such a bang-up job lookin' out for yourself. You know, maybe if you took care of yourself, try actin' normal for a change, you could find a woman who'd-- I don't know, what do I care?

STEVE

He said thanks.

HUGH

Steve?

CLAIRE

*(to Steve)*

That was sarcasm, Honey.

STEVE

No, he said, "Thanks for looking out for me."

CLAIRE

It's called sarcasm. Isn't it, Uncle Bunny?

BUNNY

Sarcasm. Yeah.

CLAIRE

Which means the opposite of what you say.

STEVE

The opposite?

HUGH

Steve.

STEVE

Sorry, Dad.

CLAIRE

*(instructive)*

"I'm not sorry, Dad."

BUNNY

Well-- Okay, almost.

HUGH

Rule Number Three: Horn-playing will be confined to the bathroom, with the door shut. When no one's home.

CLAIRE

Oh, Hugh, I'm always home.

STEVE

I don't mind.

HUGH

Steve. Go out and mow the lawn, Chief.

STEVE

Aye-aye, Sir. I won't go out, and I won't mow the lawn.

HUGH

What?

BUNNY

Nice try.

HUGH

Rule Number Four--and this goes for all of you:  
There'll be no sarcasm in this house.

BUNNY

Good rule.

*Outside, **A CAR HORN HONKS.** Claire peeks through the blinds.*