

TENDER IS THE GYM

By Glenn Alterman

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SYNOPSIS: Have you ever been asked to dance at a gym at 4 A.M.? This very strange request makes Harold feel uneasy, but George is persistent. As the play continues we discover who George, Harold and soon Gloria really are and what their relationship is to one another.

"Like Edward Albee mixed with Tennessee Williams" — Josh Kimert, literary manager, Gower Street Players

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 2 males)

GEORGE (m)..... Can be played by an actor in his early 20's to 30's, vulnerable, intense. *(58 lines)*

HAROLD (m) Can be played by an actor in his mid 50's to mid 60's, can be a bit gruff. *(27 lines)*

GLORIA (f) Can be played by an actress in her mid 50's to early 60's, anxious, upset. *(29 lines)*

TIME: 4 A.M.

SETTING: A small weight room in a gym.

This play was originally developed by the New Circle Theater Company.

AT START: *A small weight room in a gym, 4 A.M. HAROLD is staring straight ahead into the "mirror," while working out with dumbbells. GEORGE is sitting on a nearby bench. He catches HAROLD'S eye in the "mirror."*

GEORGE: *(Politely.)* Weights?

HAROLD: *(Stopping his workout.)* What?

GEORGE: I'm waiting for those weights.

HAROLD: Oh, you mean these dumbbells?

GEORGE: Right, wrong word. Sorry, my brain's not.... And I'm a playwright, you'd think I'd know which words... Long night, couldn't sleep. Anyway, yeah, right. You through with those *dumbbells*?

HAROLD: *(Handing him the dumbbells.)* Sure, here ya go.

GEORGE: *(Smiling.)* Thanks. I'm sure glad this place was open.

HAROLD: Twenty-four hours.

GEORGE: *(Looking around.)* Y'know, I like it here early in the morning.

HAROLD: Yeah, me too.

GEORGE: It's so peaceful, you can get some thinking done, *(Working out with the dumbbells.)* along with a good workout.

HAROLD: So you're a playwright?

GEORGE: *(Smiling.)* Yes sir, guilty as charged. I'm a writer.

HAROLD: Well I'm a reader

GEORGE: *(Stopping, looking at him.)* What?

HAROLD: I read manuscripts. Own my own company. Well actually, it's a family business, but I'm in charge.

GEORGE: Writer, reader, opposite sides of a coin.

HAROLD: Yeah. —So what are you writing?

GEORGE: Well actually, I'm *wrestling* with this crazy, dysfunctional family drama. I know, I know, seems like every playwright writes at least one painful family play. But this one... this one's *torturous*.

HAROLD: *(Starts doing some stretches.)* Must be tough.

GEORGE: You have no idea.

HAROLD: No, I think I do. We're sorta similar, me and you.

GEORGE: Yeah, how?

HAROLD: Well for one thing we're both here at this weird hour working out.

GEORGE: *(Smiling.)* Yeah, right. Only other person here is old Jake, downstairs.

HAROLD: Jake, yeah, “the gatekeeper.” Good man. Can’t get in here without him.

GEORGE: Right. *(Putting the dumbbells down.)* Can I ask you something?

HAROLD: *(Stopping, looking at him.)* Sure, what?

GEORGE: Would you dance with me?

HAROLD: What?!

GEORGE: Would you please dance with me?

HAROLD: *(Seeing that he’s not kidding.)* No!

GEORGE: Why not?

HAROLD: Look, maybe you got the wrong idea, but I’m not...!

GEORGE: I just want to dance with you, that’s all.

HAROLD: *(Backing off a bit.)* Hey buddy, if you’re gay that’s okay. I’m just not...

GEORGE: I’m not gay. I’m just a guy just like you.

HAROLD: *(Getting annoyed.)* Hey, you don’t know anything about me!

GEORGE: *(Looking at him.)* If you say so.

HAROLD: *(A bit annoyed.)* Just finish your work out, okay? *(HAROLD starts stretching, GEORGE stares at him in the mirror.)*

GEORGE: Sure, sorry.

GEORGE continues staring at HAROLD in the “mirror” as HAROLD starts doing sit ups. After a moment HAROLD notices GEORGE staring at him. He stops, looks at GEORGE.

HAROLD: *(Annoyed.)* Hey, would you stop staring at me in the mirror?

GEORGE: What’s the matter? It’s just a mirror.

HAROLD: Well you’re starting to make me feel uncomfortable.

GEORGE: *(Suddenly lashing out.)* Uncomfortable, you’re uncomfortable?! Hey, you have no idea...! *(Suddenly upset, yelling.)* ME, I’M uncomfortable! I can’t finish this damn play and it’s torturing me! And I’ve got to finish it! Means more to me than any other...! It’s my family play, you understand?! Family! *(Stopping himself.)* Jesus, I don’t... Sorry, I didn’t mean ... Have no idea why I’m even telling you any of this. *(Gently.)* But this play... I don’t know, it feels like I’ve been working on it my whole...!

HAROLD: *(Looking at him, sincerely.)* It’s okay. Just relax, son. It’ll come to you.

GEORGE: *(Looking at him.)* Thanks. *(Then, softly.)* I just want to dance with you, that's all. I know it must seem crazy. But I need... *(Holding his arms out to him, gently.)* Would you please dance with me?

HAROLD: *(Looks at him, confused. Softer.)* I told you...

GEORGE: *(Then, softer, smiling.)* C'mon, dance your troubles away.

HAROLD: What?

GEORGE: Something someone once told me. And he used to say "Be brave, always be brave."

HAROLD: What are you talking about?

GEORGE: Nothing, something my... *(Holding his arms out, softly pleading.)* Please, let's just dance.

HAROLD: *(HAROLD looks at him for a moment, then gets up, slowly goes over to GEORGE, stands in front of him, uncomfortably.)* You realize this is crazy.

GEORGE: *(Smiling, gently.)* It's just dancing. *(They stand there for a moment looking at each other. Then very slowly they begin to dance. After a few moments HAROLD finally starts to relax. GEORGE smiles at him. Softly.)* Told ya.

The room is quiet. They continue dancing slowly, looking at each other. After a few moments, a woman, GLORIA, quickly enters the weight room. She sees them, stops, stares at them. GEORGE sees her, quickly pulls away from HAROLD, embarrassed. HAROLD goes over to a nearby bench, sits, and watches them.

GLORIA: *(To GEORGE, embarrassed.)* I'm so sorry!

GEORGE: No, s'okay.

GLORIA: *(Entering the room.)* I just came here to work out. I'll be out of here in...

GEORGE: Take your time.

GLORIA: Thanks. *(Anxiously, indicating the dumbbells.)* So are still you using those weights?

GEORGE: They're dumbbells.

GLORIA: Dumbbells, right. I knew what they were. I'm a little out of it. I couldn't sleep and...

GEORGE: Yeah, me too.

GLORIA: Glad this place was open. That strange man downstairs let me in.

GEORGE: That's Jake, *(Smiling.)* he's the gatekeeper. Good man. I couldn't sleep either. I'm a playwright, and I've been having trouble working on this family play. S'been driving me nuts. So I ended up here at four in the morning. And Jake kindly let me in. Anyway, I think I finally may have broken through. Something just "clicked."

GLORIA: *(Smiling.)* Oh, that's great. And that's so funny, I'm an actress.

GEORGE: Really?!

GLORIA: Yeah, and I'm in rehearsal for this really BIZARRE play. My character, the mother, she's making me nuts! Her relationship with her family is so strange, so sad

GEORGE: I know what you mean.

GLORIA: I'm trying to like "get" her, y'know. I feel like I really know her, but she seems so...

GEORGE: ...out of reach?

GLORIA: Yes! *(Smiling.)* I thought you might understand

GEORGE: I do. I'm really not that different than you.

GLORIA: Anyway, I've been obsessing about her and her family. It's been—*torturous*.

GEORGE: *(Smiling.)* Guess that's why we came here.

GLORIA: *(Looking at him, smiling.)* Yes. *(A beat, softer.)* Can I ask you something?

GEORGE: Sure.

GLORIA: Why were you dancing alone just now?

GEORGE: Why? I don't know, I just needed too.

GLORIA: But by yourself?

GEORGE: I was thinking about my play, trying to figure it out—and then I just started dancing, alone. Guess it must have looked...

GLORIA: ...very relaxing. You seemed so at peace, so content. I almost didn't want to interrupt you.

GEORGE: *(Smiling.)* I'm glad you did.

GLORIA: *(A beat, smiling.)* So can I have those *dumbbells* now?

GEORGE: *(Handing her the dumbbells.)* Yeah, sure.

GLORIA: *(Starting to work out with the dumbbells.)* Maybe I'll be able let go of some of this craziness, finally figure her out.

GEORGE: *(Looking at her.)* I think I may have a better idea.

GLORIA: (*Stopping.*) Yeah, what?

GEORGE: (*Softly.*) Would you care to dance with me?

GLORIA: (*Looking at him, confused.*) What?

GEORGE: (*Holding out his arms, smiling at her.*) Might help.

GLORIA: (*Looking at him, a half smile, starting to work out again.*) No, thanks, I'm fine. I should just finish my work out and get going.

GEORGE: (*Smiling.*) Dance your troubles away. (*Then, gently, smiling, but more insistent.*) Come on, come dance with me.

GLORIA: (*Half smiling.*) Are you hitting on me, young man?

GEORGE: (*Smiling.*) No, not at all.

GLORIA: (*Smiling.*) You sure?

GEORGE: I'm gay—and I'm not hitting on you, really. I'm simply asking you to dance, just dance, that's all.

GLORIA: Why?

GEORGE: Well, if for no other reason, it's better than dancing *alone*. (*Holding out his arms to GLORIA.*) Come on... (*She just looks at him, then gently.*) please.

GLORIA: (*Taking a hesitant step towards GEORGE.*) You realize this is crazy, dancing in a weightlifting room at four in the morning?

GEORGE: (*Smiling.*) Sometimes a little crazy is good for what ails you.

GLORIA: (*Smiling.*) Well you've certainly got a way with words.

GEORGE: (*Smiling.*) As a playwright that really means a lot to me, (*Tenderly.*) especially coming from you. (*GLORIA looks a bit confused.*)

GLORIA: But you hardly even know me.

GEORGE: (*He just looks at her, smiles.*) Well we know each other now.

GLORIA: (*Looking at GEORGE.*) Yes, I guess we do. (*After a moment she slowly goes over to him. Stands in front of him. She looks uncomfortable.*) There's no music.

GEORGE: (*Smiling.*) No? (*He puts his arms out to her, they slowly start to dance. At first she seems very uncomfortable, but then slowly starts to relax.*)

GEORGE: Can you hear it? ...Listen, Mom. (*They continue dancing.*) Can you hear the music now?

GLORIA: (*After a moment, looking at him, smiling.*) Yes.

GEORGE: I knew you would.

GLORIA: YES!

GEORGE: ...That's why we're here, Mom.

GLORIA: *(Smiling.)* It's so... beautiful.

GEORGE: *(Smiling.)* Yes... it is.

They continue to dance. GEORGE briefly looks over at HAROLD, who's still sitting on the bench, watching them, smiling. Then GEORGE looks back at GLORIA as they continue dancing, smiling. The lights slowly fade.

THE END

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